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Facilitating non-violent change in complex multicultural communities through structured dialogue

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Abstract

This PhD research study is concerned with the conditions and effects of intercultural dialogue on its participants and their peers. Through the use of a dialogical action research inquiry it investigates the experiences of participants in a structured and sustained intercultural dialogue process facilitated by the researcher. The participants aimed to identify barriers that inhibited different cultural communities from building relationships with each other, and goals on how to overcome these barriers. In addition to examining the experiences of dialogue participants the study also researches in what ways ideas, frames of interaction and group behaviours developed during the dialogical inquiry and how they affected changes outside the dialogue group within the peer networks and communities of participants. As a dialogical action research project, the study documents action plans and change projects and their implementation through the inquiry group. It hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how dialogue processes and action research can encourage generative social change, reduction of prejudices and building of meaningful and sustainable positive relationships between members of a diverse society.

The action research took place in Brisbane, Australia, and included a group of thirteen people from diverse cultural backgrounds including Indigenous and white settler Australians, migrants from Kenya, South Sudan, Mozambique and refugees from Burma, Afghanistan and Ethiopia. The study is located in a context of contested multiculturalism in Australia and addresses issues of racism, exclusion and a fear of difference. These phenomena are investigated through a conceptual framework based on complex systems science which allows an understanding of discourses of racism and fear of the other as historical narratives perpetuated by social interactions between agents in a social system. These interactions have created a system attractor influencing Australian perceptions of Indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. The systems theory of social emergence is used to explain how such narratives develop in a complex social system and how a dialogue process can counteract strong attractors to provide relief from the effects of downward causation exhibited by social structure. This theory is used to construct and refine a model of intercultural dialogue that emphasises the importance of dialogic moments and can change behaviours and attitudes within the dialogue group. Through the personal networks of dialogue participants, these changed attitudes were communicated outside the micro-system of the dialogue group and affected peer networks and communities of dialogue participants.

Research data was gathered through an innovative computer-assisted dialogue process, which allowed participants to record, analyse and structure their ideas in text-form. It was complemented by focus groups with dialogue participants and through interviews with people from the peer networks of the dialogue group members. This qualitative data was coded and analysed through the lens of the conceptual framework.

The findings include perceptions of how relationships changed during the dialogical inquiry, how the participants developed better skills at analysing community conflict and at articulating their own and their communities' needs. The findings also provide examples of how historical narratives can prevent people from participating in dialogue and how they impact on their ideas and views expressed during dialogue. During the inquiry group sessions participants experienced dialogic moments which impacted on them and helped produce collective ideas and frames of interaction. The group developed a number of action plans and project ideas and collaborated to implement some of them. They included increasing participation of community elders at each other's celebrations and events, distribution of a report of the findings of the dialogical inquiry to government and civil society and working with schools to improve the knowledge of young people about cultural diversity.

The study contends that the most significant impacts within peer networks of participants did not result from these specific action plans but from the way in which participants changed their interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, and how they reproduced the respectful and friendly relationships that they had developed during the dialogue process with others outside the dialogue. Based on these findings, the thesis argues for more emphasis on relationship-building, personal story sharing and encouragement of dialogic moments over the development of specific and measurable action plans. This allows for a critical discussion of common peacebuilding and community development methodologies which preference outcome-focus over process-focus, and the development of a more concise definition of dialogue that differentiates it from other conflict resolution processes such as mediation and negotiation. It also responds to a common critique of dialogue as being difficult to define and practise by offering an innovative and reproducible dialogue method, based on systems theory which allows for the collection of data as part of the dialogue itself.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Publications during candidature

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dialogue, complex systems, multiculturalism, racism, emergence, system attractors, action research, social change, group facilitation, interactive management

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Table of contents

List of figures and tables

Figures

Tables

List of abbreviations used in the thesis

ACPACS	Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
ALM	Attractor Landscape Model
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CDD	Creative Dialogue and Design
IM	Interactive Management
ISM	Interpretive Structural Modeling
MAQ	Multicultural Affairs Queensland
NGT	Nominal Group Technique

1. Introduction: research idea, researcher background, significance of research, aims and boundaries and outline of the thesis

> For us personally there was a lack of relationship before we started this dialogue. We now have more respect for other people's cultures. We have built relationships. We built bridges. We have multiplied. We should spread the message further. (CDD Inquiry Group, October 2011)

Conflict is an enduring feature of human existence. It is ubiquitous and involves human beings at all levels of society. Despite the end of the Cold War, at least one sixth of the world's population belongs to disadvantaged community groups at risk of conflict (Coleman 2003, p. 4). Often these conflicts involve some degree of recognised difference between groups or individuals which is considered a driver or even source of the conflict. Such conflicts range from Indigenous claims for self-determination and multiculturalism to regional or ethnic conflicts (Brigg 2008, p. 2). For Samuel Huntington (1993, p. 25) the differences between groups of people even herald a 'clash of civilisations'. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2006, p. xvii) criticises Huntington's oversimplification of difference and asserts that 'the prospects of peace in the contemporary world may well lie in the recognition of the plurality of our affiliations and in the use of reasoning as common inhabitants of a wide world.'

In Australia conflicts related to difference have had an ongoing and pervasive impact on the structure of society and have resulted in a continuing debate about the direction of Australian multiculturalism, the relationship between Indigenous and settler Australians and the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers entering the country. These conflicts have also led to the discrimination of people from non-white settler backgrounds, violent incidents involving people identifying with particular cultural communities and an enduring racism which is often denied by Australian politicians (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 18).

Many of these incidents occur because people have no or few prior relationships with members from other cultures and backgrounds. To build constructive relationships and to move towards an acknowledgment and appreciation of difference requires some form of dialogical engagement across difference.

This thesis explores the conditions and effects of one particular kind of such engagement: the practice of facilitated small-group dialogue. Through the use of a dialogical action research inquiry it investigates the experiences of participants in a structured and sustained intercultural dialogue process facilitated by the researcher. The participants aimed to identify barriers which inhibited different cultural communities from

building relationships with each other, and goals on how to overcome these barriers. In addition to examining the experiences of dialogue participants, the study also aimed to discover in what ways ideas, frames of interaction and group behaviours developed during the dialogical inquiry and how they affected changes outside the dialogue group. To this effect peers of the dialogue participants were interviewed. As a dialogical action research project, the study was able to document action plans and change projects and their implementation through the inquiry group. It hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how dialogue processes and action research can encourage generative social change, reduction of prejudices, and building of meaningful and sustainable positive relationships between members of a diverse society.

Originally this PhD project was begun in 2008 and much has changed since the original conceptualisation of the research idea and methodology. As a part-time PhD student and lecturer at the University of Queensland the author had the luxury of an unhurried approach to data collection which included a dialogical inquiry process lasting more than nine months and more than 23 meetings, as requested by the inquiry group participants. Since the end of the data collection it also provided the researcher and the participants with unique opportunities for other projects and research opportunities, some related to the PhD and some not.

1.1 Personal and professional connections with the research topic

During the action research inquiry I have developed a complex relationship to the inquiry process and to the research participants which needs to be acknowledged. I also made important boundary decisions about the communities and social networks which I engaged with for this research. In this section I explain how these decisions relate to my own background and experience.

The effects of inter-group dialogue on complex multicultural communities have been of great personal interest to me because of two significant developments in my life: I shifted the focus of my professional work from an adversarial view of conflict as a lawyer in Germany, to facilitating dialogical and participative processes like mediation and inter-group dialogue here in Australia. At the same time I encountered the rich and diverse

social tapestry of the many different Indigenous and settler communities that make up South East Queensland when I migrated here in 2005.[1]

I was fortunate to take up a research assistant and later lecturer position at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) at The University of Queensland. In this position I was first introduced to the complex and unresolved issues between Indigenous and (white) settler Australians as well as discussions and debates about migration and the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. 2005 was also the year of the Cronulla Riots. On 11 December 2005 approximately 5000 white Australians, fuelled by alcohol, attacked people of Middle Eastern appearance near Sydney's Cronulla beach. The catalyst was a fight between three surf lifesavers and a group of four young men of Lebanese background the weekend before. Tabloid newspapers and talkback radio whipped up hysteria and a now famous text-message was sent urging all white Australians to take back the beach and to 'support Leb and wog bashing day' (Poynting 2006). Some Middle Eastern Australians and migrants retaliated and the fighting continued throughout the night. In the aftermath of the riot then Prime Minister John Howard famously declared that there was 'no racism in Australia' (Sydney Morning Herald 2005).

The following year I was given the opportunity to assist in the preparation of a youth summit in Brisbane which aimed to respond to issues of racism, discrimination and exclusion in South East Queensland and to prevent similar events from occurring here. At one of the facilitated dialogue circles that were used as part of the summit a young man of Middle Eastern background described how difficult it was to call Australia home even though he was born here. He connected this experience with white Australia's disrespect towards its First Nations Peoples. I remember him saying:

> How can we ever feel welcome and respected here if this country does not even respect its traditional owners?[2]

This statement has stuck with me since then and it has inspired me to engage in various practice and research projects with the aim to improve relationships between different cultural communities and to combat issues of racism and discrimination. As part of this ongoing practice and research interest, I chaired various inter-agency meetings of

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[1] Indigenous Australians refers to people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. During the dialogical inquiry for this PhD the Indigenous Australians who participated in the research expressed the view that they preferred the term First Nations Australians or First Nations Peoples. In the following these term are also used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

[2] Traditional owners is another term for First Nations Peoples and refers to the particular groups who have connections to a particular part of land.

the South East Queensland Intercultural Cities Forum, worked in culturally diverse school environments, with city councils and with Queensland Police Service. The youth summit also made me realise that constructive discussion and dialogue can be liberating experiences for people suffering from such discrimination and exclusion and that they can create the basis for collective action towards non-violent social change.

While I was able to experience these effects first hand at the summit and through some of my own work, I struggled with finding a theoretical basis to explain where the discriminating discourses so prevalent in Australian society came from and how conflict resolution processes could make a difference to a problem so ubiquitous and intractable. In 2008, shortly after commencing in the PhD program, I attended the inaugural Complexity & Conflict Resolution Conference at the Werner Institute at Creighton University in Nebraska. This conference aimed to bring together conflict resolution practitioners and complex systems scientists to discover synergies and potential areas of collaboration. At this time the use of theories derived from complexity science in social science and particularly in conflict resolution was still in its infancy. The conference discussions and systems facilitations affirmed my initial view that complex systems science was useful in explaining how historical narratives about difference and exclusion originate and also for understanding effects or lack of effects of conflict resolution and peacebuilding work on communities and societies.

The other parallel between conflict resolution and complex systems science was a strong emphasis on relationships between people, or in complex systems language, agents in a social system. Here was a field of science which explored, analysed and emphasised the functions of relationships. This has focused my theoretical understanding of conflict resolution and has provided an important theoretical basis for examining how small-group conflict resolution processes, like dialogue, can have effects beyond the small group involved.

The final piece which made the research in this thesis possible was a consulting project which I undertook as director of Peace and Conflict Studies Institute Australia (PaCSIA), a Brisbane-based not-for-profit organisation. In 2010 I was contracted by Brisbane City Council to develop a large-group intercultural dialogue process to bring together First Nations Australians, migrants, refugees and other people from new and emerging communities. A strong driver of this project were community leaders from various African communities settled in Brisbane who requested more and better contact with the traditional owners of the land. I employed a systemic facilitation technique, the World Café

Conversations method (Brown, Isaacs & Community 2005) and we called the dialogue meetings Community Café Dialogues to emphasise the building of connected communities. The project was successful and I facilitated six large-group dialogue meetings with between twenty-five and sixty participants.

Towards the end of the project many participants asked about a continuation of the dialogues which they all enjoyed and found valuable and innovative. Like so often in community-based work, the funding from the original grant had ceased and no further dialogues were planned. This was also the time when I designed the research methodology for my PhD research. With permission from Brisbane City Council and after satisfying the requirements of the ethical review process at the university, I suggested to the participants of the last two Community Café Dialogues that it would be possible to continue a smaller but more sustained form of dialogue as part of my research and asked for people interested to put their names on a volunteer list. From this list the initial members of the Creative Dialogue & Design (CDD) inquiry group for this research study were recruited.

Parallel to this research I applied for further funding to continue the Community Café Dialogues and during the action planning phase of this PhD action research inquiry the inquiry group members themselves formed a reference group for the next Community Café Dialogues project. Since the end of the data collection I have facilitated more than 40 Community Café Dialogues and the Cafés have become a sustainable and ongoing program in Brisbane which brings together people from various cultural and other communities to engage in facilitated discussion about questions that matter to them while at the same time building connections and exploring relationships with each other. While the CDD process, which is described in detail in Chapter Four, is different from World Café facilitation, both are based on systems science and systemic thinking.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention two friends and mentors who have significantly influenced my decision to use CDD as the facilitation and inquiry process: Professor Benjamin Broome, who spent a sabbatical at ACPACS in 2006 and who pioneered the use of Interactive Management, the original name of CDD, in a peacebuilding dialogue in Cyprus. He introduced me to the method and has since then acted as a mentor and sounding board for various questions about the process, software and facilitation.

The other person is my dear friend Polly Walker with whom I shared an office for a number of years and who introduced me to a number of Aboriginal elders in Brisbane. Polly Walker was the one who suggested using CDD for cross-cultural peacebuilding

workshops with First Nations Australians and who also worked with me as the co-facilitator of our first experiments with CDD in 2007. She was also the one who coined the term Creative Dialogue & Design after some of the people we worked with struggled with the technicality of the name Interactive Management.

1.2 Significance of research: intercultural violence, racism and exclusion in contemporary Australian communities

Australia views itself as a multicultural society which encourages and celebrates diversity and strives for social cohesion. However issues of racism, national and religious identity, cultural diversity and inter-community violence are continuously being debated in media, politics and social forums (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 1). In spite of government policies aimed at peaceful co-existence and fair treatment of all people living in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009), inter-group conflict between members of different ethnic, religious or cultural groups is relatively common, particularly in areas where new migrants settle. This section provides references to a selection of media reports regarding incidents of conflict related to difference or of discriminatory or racist incidents and their effects on communities.

The most prominent examples of inter-group conflict in Australia include the rising hostility towards Arab and Muslim Australians since September 11 which contributed to the 'Cronulla Riot' mentioned above (Poynting 2006; Poynting & Criminology 2004, p. 243). However, violence and abuse are not solely directed against Muslim and Middle-Eastern Australians.

In 2008 and 2009 numerous media reports mentioned violent attacks against foreign students in Australia, with a number of high profile cases involving foreign students of Indian background (ABC/AAP 2009; Collins & Perkins 2008; Donaghey 2008; Rout 2009; Turtle 2009). When thousands of people protested against the violent attacks on these students a counter-movement on Facebook gathered nearly 65,000 members who referred to 'curry munching idiots' in their posts and called for migrants to assimilate into Australian culture (Simmons 2009).

In 2008 a group of seventeen teenagers of African backgrounds initiated a complaint against a group of police officers in the Melbourne suburb of Flemington who had allegedly harassed, bashed and abused them for a period of over five years (Waters 2013). In 2009 a group of young white men in Alice Springs first terrorised a group of sleeping First Nations Australians with their car by driving into their camp and then beat to death a thirty-

three year old Aboriginal man. When the case came to court the chief justice acknowledged that the Aboriginality of the victims was a factor in the crimes but praised the character of the defendants at the same time. A few hours after the young men were convicted and comparatively lenient sentences were imposed, a girlfriend of one of the killers organised a party to celebrate (Graham 2010).

In 2008 an Aboriginal man was killed by a group of young Pacific Islanders in Logan.[3] Since then there have been ongoing tensions between these two cultural groups (Bita 2008; Calligeros 2008; Kelm 2008; Schwarten 2008). During the court hearings following the killing, First Nations Australians protested in front of the court house and called for Pacific Islanders to be deported (Kellett 2008). The family of the victim talked about regular incidents of violence in the area and called for more initiatives by community elders to address them (Wray 2008). In 2012 a Brisbane man first threatened a group of African-Australians at a park, then dumped rubbish in the front yard of his African-Australian neighbour's home and later attempted to burn down the house (Baskin 2012). In 2013 tensions in the Logan area flared up again after a four-day standoff and violent assaults between a First Nations Australian family and a Pacific Islander family living on the same street (Paull 2013; Paull & Berry 2013; The Courier Mail 2013).

For more than twenty years one of the most controversial issues with regards to intercultural relationships has been the treatment of asylum seekers, especially those who arrive by boat in Australian territory. Tsiolkas (2013) argues that there has been a fifteen year political campaign in Australia to breed fear, misconceptions and fury about asylum seekers which has led to firmly established patterns of racism and exclusion. Between 1976 and 2013 fewer than 50,000 asylum seekers reached Australia on boats, a small number compared to other developed countries. Australia's early responses to these arrivals (most of whom were found to be genuine refugees) were compassionate and welcoming. When a boat of 2000 Vietnamese refugees arrived in the 1970s asylum seekers were warmly welcomed into the community (Manne 2013). This attitude changed in 1989 when a boat with 600 mainly Cambodian asylum seekers arrived. Then Prime Minister Bob Hawke labelled these refugees as 'queue jumpers', a label that has stuck with boat arrivals until today. When the asylum seekers, with the help of Australian lawyers, lodged an appeal against the government's decision to turn down their plea for asylum in 1992, the government amended the *Migration Act* and allowed for a period of

[3] Logan City is located between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. It has more than 292,000 inhabitants and very high cultural diversity.

detention of up to 272 days. It also restricted the courts from reviewing executive decisions (Manne 2013).

This legislative action set a precedent and numerous Australian governments have further amended the legislation regarding asylum seekers arriving by boat to deny them any protections. Detention centres were built first in Australia, and then under Prime Minister John Howard's 'Pacific Solution' on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, on Christmas Island and in Nauru.

For the past two decades Australia has treated asylum seekers arriving by boat (in contrast to those arriving by plane) in what could be considered breaches of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons and other human rights legislation. The treatment of asylum seekers is a highly political issue in Australia, which can cost a party an election. In 2001 it looked like the Howard government would lose the election due later that year. In August of the same year a Norwegian cargo ship, the *Tampa*, rescued 438 Afghans from a sinking asylum seeker boat. The Australian Government refused the Tampa the right to enter Australian waters and the ship was boarded by Australian soldiers. Since then the Australian Navy has been used to patrol Australia's sea borders and to turn back asylum seeker boats. Through deliberate exaggerations, the government implied that the Labor opposition's policy on asylum seekers was soft and on a wave of xenophobia the conservative government was re-elected (Manne 2013).

Opinion polls indicate that the majority of the Australian public supports these measures (Manne 2013). Whenever asylum seekers and their supporters protest against the treatment, this seems to further entrench public opinion supporting mandatory detention and border control policies (Manne 2013). The current conservative government has once again tightened legislation, strengthened border patrols and has turned around asylum seekers vessels. It has also proposed that no asylum seeker arriving by boat will ever be settled in Australia and is negotiating settlement deals with Papua New Guinea and Cambodia, both countries which are considered unsuitable for the resettlement of refugees. These policies have led to riots in the offshore detention centres which have cost at least one asylum seeker his life (Brewster & Richards 2014). At the time of writing a hunger strike is ongoing and there are reports that asylum seekers have sewn their lips shut (Doherty 2015). Incidents of self-harm and mental illness are common in the detention centres and a number of medical and social service providers have openly criticised the policies of the Department of Immigration and Border Control (Whyte 2014).

Recently the powers of the minister for Immigration and Border Control have been extended further and access to judicial review through the Refugee Review Tribunal has been revoked for boat arrivals (Doherty 2014).

While it needs to be acknowledged that representation of these incidents in the media can be contested and may not necessarily depict a realistic picture of intercultural conflict in Queensland, and beyond that in Australia, the reports do point to an ongoing problem in Australian communities. The level of public support for the draconian measures aimed at deterring asylum seekers and the disturbing reports about racist social media movements points to a deep-rooted fear of the other and a paranoid nationalism prevalent within the white Australian majority population (Westoby 2014, p. 18).

A British study on community cohesion found that positive cohesion across difference does not happen without practical community intervention and that it can be a difficult long-term process. A key ability for increasing cohesion is the facilitation of meaningful inter-group contact and dialogue that addresses issues and tensions, challenges myths and prejudices, resolves conflict and encourages participation and co-operation (Daley 2007, p. 166). Based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, research by Turoy-Smith and colleagues (Turoy-Smith, Kane & Pedersen 2013, p. 193) has found that a major factor in the mediation of prejudices amongst Australians is the quality of contact with disadvantaged groups such as First Nations Australians and refugees. The higher the quality of contact that people have with members of their own out-groups, the better their experiences and the less prejudiced they are.

The research in this thesis has provided for such quality contact for a small group of people from mostly disadvantaged communities. An analysis of their experiences and collective actions has the potential to benefit communities in Australia and to provide input into community development practices and policy-making to support constructive conflict engagement and positive relations across difference. Finally, the thesis applies a framework based on complex systems science to the facilitation process, the action research inquiry and the data analysis. It is hoped that this provides useful insights and furthers knowledge and theory building in the application of complex systems principles to the social sciences and to action for social change. This approach is new and innovative in that it addresses one of the fundamental questions of peace and conflict studies, namely how interpersonal small-group processes like dialogue can positively affect changes within communities and society at large.

1.3 Research aims, research questions and boundary decisions

From the previous section it becomes obvious that the study is deeply embedded into local politics, community relations, incidents and occurrences of local, national and international importance. Many of the observations need to be considered snapshots of particular moments in time, within a dynamic and constantly changing society which grapples with the legacy of a colonial past while at the same time trying to deal with contemporary problems such as the increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to Australia. To better understand the micro to macro link of small-group dialogue and social change, as well as the constraints placed upon dialogue participants through their previous experiences and historical narratives, a conceptual framework based on complex systems science and systemic thinking will be presented. The research also aims to further refine and develop complex systems ideas and theories, as well as the practice of dialogue in the context of peacebuilding and community development. These research questions will be further developed in the conceptual framework of the thesis.

The conceptual framework will be used to analyse the data created by the dialogical inquiry group and data recorded during interviews with participants from the peer networks of dialogue participants. By analysing the experiences of inquiry participants and their peers the thesis examines how participants in a small-group intercultural dialogue process experience changes in relationship and the emergence of collective frames of interaction (research question one). Moreover it investigates how participants in the peer networks of dialogue participants are affected by the dialogue, and how they think they influence it (research question two). Most of the scholarly literature on CDD/IM is concerned with the results of inquiry processes (Broome 1995, 1997, 2004; Laouris, Erel, et al. 2009; Laouris, Michaelides, et al. 2009). This thesis complements such research with a strong focus on the experiences of participants during the actual inquiry process.

The title of this thesis refers to ‘complex multicultural communities’ in which the research was carried out. The question arises why the thesis focuses on communities and not other social units such as class or society. There are recent examples in Australian history in which community-based conflict was portrayed as class-based. John Owen (2006) presents the example of what were called the Macquarie Fields Riots of 2005.[4]

[4] On the night of 25 February 2005 three young men in a stolen car crashed into a tree in a narrow street in the public housing estate of Macquarie Fields in South Sydney. Before the crash they had been pursued by police officers in an unmarked car. While the driver survived, the two passengers died on impact. The community protested against the actions of the police and four nights of unrest and intense commentary and coverage by media and politicians followed (Owen 2006, p. 5)

Media commentary and statements from politicians clearly posited this conflict as an issue of criminality and social class, referring to the mostly young and unemployed people who were ‘hanging out on the streets’ as the main culprits (Owen 2006, p. 7). While undoubtedly the participants in the unrest were of diverse origins, ethnicities and backgrounds, they were not considered ‘the community of Macquarie Fields’.

In contrast, the media excerpts presented in the previous section, often specifically referred to nationality, ethnicity or origin of conflicting parties. When this thesis refers to communities then, it refers to social units that are more distinct ethnic categorisations than socio-economic class. This thesis is interested in conflicts in which some form of ethnic difference is recognised and problematised. It makes a deliberate boundary decision to apply ethnicity to the social units investigated. This does not mean class is not significant in the lives of the people who participated in this study, it is simply to say that class was not foregrounded. Instead ethnicity and community were. While it considers communities as fluid, overlapping experiences of social networks, it also recognises that they are social units which foster belonging in individuals and which allow them to define in-groups and out-groups. A working definition of community will be developed in the literature review.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters and provides additional information in the appendices.

Chapter One introduces the research aims, outlines the connections of the thesis with the interests and background of the researcher, makes an argument for the significance of the research, and presents the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two first reviews relevant literature on the history of Australian multiculturalism and engagement with Indigenous Australia. It proposes that the underlying racism that is prevalent in Australian society is at least partially fuelled by a paranoid nationalism experienced by white settler Australians. After providing an overview of the field of complex systems science the chapter then applies systemic thinking to analyse this paranoid nationalism. It is posited that a fear of otherness can be conceptualised as a system attractor which developed through positive feedback loops in Australian society. Negative cross-cultural experiences emerged into historical narratives and were embedded into the social structure of society. Following on from this a theory of change is developed which postulates that positive social interactions can counter this process and change the attitudes and behaviours of people in the system. The vehicle for this change

is small-group intercultural dialogue. Dialogue is then defined and the scope of dialogical work is discussed. Based on this discussion it is posited that a unique feature of dialogue is moments of mutuality and that participants in dialogue develop collective thinking and conversation. These are the vehicles for social change and the development of creative ideas.

Chapter Three introduces the reader to the conceptual framework of the thesis. Peter Coleman and colleagues' work on the Attractor Landscape Model is used to elaborate how narratives of discrimination and exclusion develop and can become so constraining that they overshadow other counter-narratives in a society. Dialogue processes are one way to develop negative feedback loops which can counter strong attractors over time and move the system into a different direction. Based on the work of Keith Sawyer and Uri Bronfenbrenner, a model of upward and outward social emergence is developed which explains how social structure is created in small-group dialogue processes and how this social structure, often in the form of ephemeral and stable emergents, impacts on meso-, exo- and macro-systems outside the dialogue group.

After a brief discussion of the underlying systemic, qualitative and critical epistemology, the research methodology is detailed in **Chapter Four**. This includes a discussion of the idea of systemic action research and its differences to other types of action research, as well as the recruitment of dialogue and peer network participants. The chapter provides a description of the dialogue method, Creative Dialogue & Design, and its underlying theory as well as a discussion of what occurred in a typical meeting of the group. It then discusses the resonance testing through peer network interviews and the data storage and analysis method. The chapter concludes with practical and ethical considerations that arose during the implementation of the research and addresses the limitations of the research methodology.

The findings related to research question one focusing on the experiences of the dialogue participants themselves are presented in **Chapter Five**. Initially, the chapter discusses the difficulty of separating research on the process from research on the content of the inquiry. The inquiry participants often used the inquiry process itself as an example for constructive dialogue and referred to it when they discussed generative cross-cultural encounters. They also developed a problem- and a vision-map of important issues which are presented and explained in the chapter. Following on from this, the chapter then presents the experiences of participants and observations from the researcher. The dialogical inquiry assisted the participants to break down barriers between each other

through the sharing of personal experiences. This was expressed in a change of interaction inside and outside the dialogue group. The inquiry also found that interaction with others is shaped by downward causation through previous experience and historical narratives. The participants discussed that engagement in dialogue can help to overcome these constraints because a fusion of horizons occurs and collective thinking and knowledge are created through the dialogical discussion. These were often also related to powerful dialogic moments experienced by the participants. The chapter concludes with reflections on the role of the researcher both as a facilitator and as a participant.

Chapter Six deals with the emergence of ideas and action from the dialogical inquiry group into the communities of participants. It discusses findings related to the development of collective ideas in dialogue which are not simply individual ideas combined but which often become more than the sum of their parts. Three specific action plans are presented: two of them were successful, one of them unsuccessful. The study found that in this particular context powerful actions and changes occurred through the changes in relationship among participants and how they communicated these outside the dialogue group. The second part of the chapter presents the findings from the peer network interviews. The peer network participants confirmed many of the ideas and views discussed by the inquiry group. On the other hand, the peer network participants were unable to refer to specific action plans developed by the group. While they thought they had indirect input into the dialogue through contact with a dialogue participant they were unable to articulate how this input occurred. Some of them were sceptical about the impact the inquiry group had on communities.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings presented in the previous chapters and applies them to issues within the scholarship of action research, peacebuilding and community development. It engages the question of how dialogical systemic action research can contribute to the understanding of dialogue and social change. It also presents a critical view to defining dialogue and offers a definition of dialogue which highlights the importance of dialogic moments and differentiates dialogue processes from other conflict resolution processes, such as negotiation and mediation. This definition also highlights the importance of the dialogic journey over the action plan outcome. While dialogical engagement is shown to be highly beneficial, historical narratives can make it impossible for participants to engage in dialogue. This needs to be recognised by practitioners and program designers. It may also explain why it is so difficult to improve engagement and connections between First Nations Peoples and white settler Australians

and why Australia seems to be so singularly focused on deterring and excluding asylum seekers. Dialogue offers a possibility to create positive counter-narratives, although systemic changes at a national level will take decades or may not occur at all.

The thesis concludes in **Chapter Eight** with a summary of the research process and a list of ideas for future research and practice. It also asks the question about what constitutes a successful action research inquiry and presents a framework to evaluate this. Finally it offers a glimpse into what occurred after the end of the study and how the researcher and the research participants are continuing the dialogical journey that this thesis is part of.

The **appendices** provide an overview of the participants of the dialogical inquiry and short vignettes on their backgrounds (Appendix 1), an outline of a sample CDD session (Appendix 2) and the schedule of all CDD inquiry sessions with dates and attendance records (Appendix 3). The appendices also include the discussion guide used for the focus groups with dialogical inquiry group members (Appendix 4), an overview including background vignettes of peer network interview participants (Appendix 5) and the peer network interview guide (Appendix 6).

2. Literature review: multiculturalism in Australia, societies as complex systems and the value of dialogue as a process for social change

Vigorous and often polemic debate occurs about multiculturalism, migration and the intake of refugees in Australia. At the same time, the country struggles with its colonial past and with relationships between First Nations Australians and settler Australians. As was outlined in the previous chapter, this thesis argues that engagement across difference can be improved by engaging people of diverse cultural backgrounds in structured dialogue processes.

In this chapter this argument is contextualised through a discussion of scholarly views of Australian multiculturalism and what I call an underlying fear of otherness. The development of multiculturalism in Australia is then analysed through the lens of theories from the field of complex systems science. This offers an explanation of how historical narratives contribute to the formation of attitudes about self and other and why it is so difficult for Australians to break free from a social structure that perpetuates racism and social exclusion of people who are different from a white Anglo ideal. A solution for enhancing cross-cultural relationships and for dealing with historical narratives of exclusion will be offered in the idea of intercultural dialogue. On a more abstract theoretical level, the chapter also engages with a perennial problem in the social sciences, how small-group processes can create generative social change within communities and societies. This problem is addressed through the use of the theory of social emergence.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section one focuses on the context of the research with regards to the history of multiculturalism in Australia and the problem of an underlying fear of difference or fear of otherness which influences the way in which First Nations Australians, migrants and refugees are treated. Following on from this, the thesis introduces complex systems science and its origins and utilises the idea of positive and negative feedback loops in complex social systems to analyse the history and problems associated with multiculturalism and a colonial legacy in Australia. It also defines the communities that the research was carried out with as complex, constantly changing and overlapping systems. The role and function of dialogue is then considered as one means of exploring the challenges of change in a social system that is characterised as being both ‘complex’ and ‘multicultural’. Dialogue is defined and the scholarly roots and approaches to dialogue are discussed. The chapter also engages with the critics of both

complex systems theory and dialogue, and argues that the research method underlying this thesis, a particular form of dialogical systemic action research, can address many of these critiques.

This literature review provides the backdrop for the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis based on the works of Keith Sawyer, Uri Bronfenbrenner and Peter Coleman and his colleagues, which is fully developed in Chapter Three.

2.1 The context of Australian multiculturalism and its engagement with First Nations Australians

On the one hand, Australia is recognised as one of the most multicultural Western nations in the world, while time and again stories of racism, stereotyping and xenophobia surface on the other hand.[5] According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2013, p. 4) around one in five Australians say they have experienced race-hate talk, such as verbal abuse or racial slurs. A broad range of examples of racist behaviour and intercultural conflict were presented in the previous chapter.

Moreover, Australia has a complex history of different and sometimes opposed policy objectives in the area of multiculturalism. This is also evident in the literature concerning Australian multiculturalism which either considers the Australian multicultural project a successful one or delivers fairly strong criticism about the multicultural policies and actions of Australian governments. In the following section, some of the landmarks of the development of multicultural thinking and policy in Australia are presented. While there exists significant literature on theory and practice of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism in general, there is much less literature available which specifically focuses on Australia.[6] The debate about multiculturalism is deeply political in Australia and commentators, researchers and scholars often approach the topic from a particular political background. Conservative politicians and commentators highlight successful multicultural policy, warn against too much immigration and highlight the necessity of strong border controls and detention of what they term 'illegal' asylum seekers arriving by boats. Progressive or left-leaning scholars often point out the dehumanising actions taken by Australian

[5] Australia has a First Nations population of approximately 517000 people (2.5% of the national population at the 2006 census) (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013, p. 4). 90% identify as Aboriginal peoples, 6% as Torres Strait Islander peoples and 4% as both. According to the 2011 census 27% of the Australian population were born overseas. 82% of these live in the capital cities. Top ten countries of birth for the overseas-born population were United Kingdom, New Zealand, China, India, Italy, Vietnam, Philippines, South Africa, Malaysia and Germany (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012-2013).

[6] For a more theoretical discussion of concepts of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism see, for example, the works of Parekh (2006) or Connolly (Connolly 2005).

governments and lament a reactive and sometimes even ignorant multicultural policy regime. This section makes reference to the political tradition from which sources are drawn.[7]

Conservative writer Mark Lopez differentiates between multiculturalism as (i) the empirical, demographic and sociological fact that Australia is an ethnically and culturally diverse, multilingual society and (ii) the ideological and normative concept 'about the way Australian society is or should be organised' (Lopez 2000, p. 3). Lopez argues that the development of multicultural policy in Australia was strongly influenced by a small number of politically left-leaning multiculturalists who influenced the change in the public policy agenda (Lopez 2000, p. 460). Overall Australian commentators agree that the country has managed the arrival and settlement of migrants and refugees relatively well and that it has incorporated an impressive number of culturally and linguistically diverse immigrants into its social, political and economic fabric without major conflicts or ongoing violence (Chiro 2011, p. 13; Hollinsworth 2006, p. 226). Nonetheless, as has been shown in Chapter One, news of conflicts involving different cultural groups, racist attacks (verbal and physical) on people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and 'talkback radio programs awash with callers who vent their frustration over the perception that their nation is taking a direction that the 'silent majority' do not favour' (Chiro 2011, p. 14) are relatively common. Even if one accepts the proposition that Australia's multicultural policy approach has achieved a measure of success at the macro level, one cannot and should not discount the significance of micro- and meso- level conflicts. These are the levels of everyday contact and interaction, and at this level interpersonal and intergroup conflicts can seriously impact on the livelihood and sense of belonging of minority groups. This is the level that the research in this thesis is aimed at and where it hopes to have an impact.

Australian sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz (2003) links the concern with multiculturalism to the history of invasion of Australia by British settlers:

> "Multiculturalism sits within a process – one that began with the invasion of the Australian continent in the late eighteenth century, and which continues today. Australia is an imperial state – its governments feel compelled to defend the land, taken by force from its Indigenous owners, against other governments or cultural groups that might contest their taking, and they need to control both the Indigenous people and new arrivals internally to ensure a continuing cultural, social and economic order."

Lopez considers Jakubowicz' approach to be a particular ideological form of politically progressive critical or ethnic rights multiculturalism which conceptualises migrant

[7] The classification is based on the researcher's interpretation and may be rejected by the authors themselves.

populations as predominantly working class and which are structurally disadvantaged by the capitalist division of labour (Lopez 2000, p. 448). Ghassan Hage (2003, p. 52) - also a writer from a critical and politically left-leaning tradition - developed the idea of 'paranoid nationalism' as the fear of Australians of being an isolated white British enclave within the heart of a non-European Asia-Pacific region. Hage argues that Australia has created a fantasy of 'white nationalism' in which those who identify more closely with the unattainable ideal of whiteness - which he interprets as an ever-changing, composite cultural historical construct with roots in the history of European colonisation - yearn to hold more social, political and national capital than those of non-white backgrounds (Hage 2000, pp. 58-9). However, for Hage, this white nationalism is fantasy, a discourse among white settler Australians that has been perpetuated throughout the history of Australia since colonisation.

Giancarlo Chiro provides a number of examples from the start of the Australian Federation which express these sentiments through the words of Australian politicians like Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales at the time of Federation (Chiro 2011, p. 18), Alfred Deakin, Australia's first Attorney-General (Chiro 2011, p. 19) and Edmund Barton, Australia's first Prime Minister (Chiro 2011, p. 19). According to Chiro all three emphasise the importance of racial purity and connection to the British motherland and dispute racial equality. Deakin was also the chief architect of the so-called 'White Australia Policy', enshrined into the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 (Chiro 2011, p. 19), which restricted immigration to Australia to people of British descent. These were powerful symbols of a white monocultural hegemony and inherent racism which shaped the discourse in Australian society from early on in the colonisation of Australia (Forrest & Dunn 2006, p. 168). The White Australia Policy remained in force until 1973.[8] After the end of World War II Australia's immigration policies were relaxed over time to respond to a period of mass immigration. Ideologies of first assimilationism and then later integrationism determined migrant settlement policy during this time (Lopez 2000, p. 2).

In the 1970s Australia's immigration policies performed a 180 degree turn when then Immigration Minister Al Grassby argued for a multicultural society based on social justice and development (Chiro 2011, p. 22). Boese and Philips (2011, p. 190) note that this shift in policy was adopted defensively rather than proactively and highlighted the unwillingness of the government to deeply and consistently engage with cultural diversity. Multicultural

[8] It was significantly relaxed from 1958 when slowly immigration was opened first to other northern European nationals and later on also to migrants from southern European countries such as Italy, Spain or Greece.

policy underwent a series of changes under different Labor and Liberal governments in the following years until in 1996 the conservative government under John Howard rode a wave of racial intolerance to win the election (Chiro 2011, p. 25; Hollinsworth 2006, p. 226). This election win 'heralded the reassertion of the traditional popular scepticism on matters of immigration, multiculturalism, links with Asia and national security' (Chiro 2011, p. 25). It also led to the disestablishment of the peak body for multicultural affairs and policy. Since the events of 9/11 and the Bali Bombings in 2002, a discourse of national security, harmony and social cohesion has permeated discussions of a multicultural Australia (Chiro 2011, p. 25). This is in stark contrast to the ideas of cultural pluralism and the enlargement of Australian society under Grassby. At the same time, Australia's policies with regards to refugees and asylum seekers became harsher and harsher to allegedly protect the sovereignty of the nation. Chiro goes so far as to suggest that the political climate ushered in by the Howard government undid thirty years of multicultural policies and 'enshrined an enduring vision of Australia as a mono-cultural and monolingual society' (2011, p. 29).

This history of multiculturalism shows similarities to the debate on engagement and reconciliation with Australia's First Nations Peoples and the lack of progress with regards to a national reconciliation agenda. Academics Sarah Maddison and Morgan Brigg write that significant energy is invested into debate and discussion of contemporary Indigenous issues, as well as an ongoing intervention into Indigenous life. They speak of 'settler anxiety' and consternation about the governance arrangements for an Indigenous minority constituted in the course of colonisation (Maddison & Brigg 2011, p. 4). For Maddison and Brigg what is needed is an 'unsettling' of the settler state and an openness to becoming unsettled, to embrace Indigenous experiences, world views and governance systems, as an essential commitment to the decolonisation process (Maddison & Brigg 2011, p. 4). In the same volume, Patrick Dodson and Darryl Cronin describe a long history of oppressive and domineering Indigenous policy in Australia which is anchored in the beliefs of the superiority of the coloniser and the portrayal of First Nations Peoples as having no civilised customs, societies or government (Dodson & Cronin 2011, p. 189). This was also expressed by the *terra nullius* doctrine, which was a central part of Australian property law.[9] The doctrine was in force until declared void by the Australian High Court in 1988 and 1992 in the Mabo decisions (Mabo v Queensland [No 1] 1988; Mabo v Queensland [No 2]

[9] The terra nullius doctrine stated that the land belonged to no-one before the arrival of British settlers. This doctrine was used to justify excluding First Nations Australians from claiming land and from demanding compensation for land alienation.

1992). It was a powerful and enduring legal artefact which symbolises the inherent racism against First Nations Australians.

According to Dodson and Cronin (Dodson & Cronin 2011, p. 192) the methodical exclusion of First Nations peoples as well as non-British migrants begun during colonisation is firmly entrenched into the thinking of white Australian elites and has manifested in significant pieces of legislation and legal doctrine. It has therefore become part of the social structure of Australian society and politics. According to Dodson and Cronin (Dodson & Cronin 2011, p. 192):

> Australian democracy has not been able to remedy the colonial legacies of exclusion, marginalisation and injustice suffered by Indigenous people, nor is it able to contemplate a way forward for an inclusive nation.

From 1991 to 2000 a formal reconciliation process was conducted and provided an opportunity to better understand and appraise the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship by forcing the country to confront its colonial history (Dodson & Cronin 2011, p. 195). However, this process fell short of acknowledging and truly engaging with notions of Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty. For Dodson central issues which were not resolved in the reconciliation process were the first nation status of Indigenous peoples and restitution for dispossession (Dodson 2000, p. 12). He laments that government instead focused on practical reconciliation involving health, housing, education and employment. According to Dodson these were normal responsibilities of government to citizens and should not have been the only areas on which progress was made during the reconciliation process (Dodson 2000, p. 12). Dodson and Cronin compare the Australian experience to the relationship of First Nations Māori people with British settlers in New Zealand. The relationship in New Zealand was based on the negotiation between quasi-equal parties which led to the Treaty of Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi Act (NZ) 1975). No such negotiation among equals ever took place in Australian history. This power imbalance remains until today.

For Dodson and Cronin, Indigenous rights and the status of Indigenous people are not separate from other national challenges such as constitutional reform, climate change, protection of refugees and Australian identity and multiculturalism. They call for a national dialogue to engage these issues and draw on concepts from complex systems science to argue for systemic, emergent and participatory processes of engagement between participants in this dialogue (Dodson & Cronin 2011, p. 199). It is hoped that the research in this thesis responds at a very modest and local level to this call for dialogue.

In summary, academics and thought leaders writing both within the field of multiculturalism and within the field of Indigenous knowledge, criticise a lack of engagement between the white settler society and the world views and communities of Indigenous peoples and migrants in Australia. What stands in the way of this is the paranoid nationalism that Hage has identified. It is a deep underlying fear of otherness or non-whiteness which concerns those who consider themselves guardians of Australian values and culture (Hage 2000, p. 67). Hollinsworth (2006, p. 226) remarks that images, symbols and stories of the past, the present and the future are created, contested, invoked and denied in the ever expanding national discourse on multiculturalism and the post-colonial relationship with Indigenous Australia. The research in this thesis is carried out in the context of these strong historical narratives and the collective fear of otherness that was identified. These are systemic patterns which have emerged out of the Australian history of colonisation and oppression of First Nations peoples and migrants. They are perpetuated and strengthened by recent events such as 9/11 and the Bali Bombings as well as a continuing stream of violent or conflictual incidents between people from different cultural backgrounds. To better understand systemic patterns and non-linear effects the following section engages theory from the field of complex systems science to better understand the systemic effects of paranoid nationalism and the way in which historical narratives constrain present and future conversations.

2.2 Complex systems approaches

Complex systems are phenomena which arise both in the natural and the social world. Commonly cited examples include ant colonies, the human brain, bird flocks, stock markets and the global climate system (Loode 2011, p. 68; Miller & Page 2007, p. 9). Within the social sciences it is argued that they can be found in markets, families and villages. What these systems have in common is that they cannot be understood and manipulated by reduction to their individual components (Hendrick 2009, p. 5). There exists no single unified theory of complexity or complex systems, instead there are several theories originally arising from studies in natural sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 23). Ben Ramalingam et al. (2008, p. viii) refer to the field of complex system science as a network-oriented model of how knowledge and ideas relate to each other. Significant work in this field is often connected with the following researchers: Stuart Kauffman, John Holland, Chris Langton and Murray Gell-Mann at the Santa Fe Institute (complex adaptive systems), Ilya Prigogine (dissipative structures), Brian Arthur (increasing returns and path dependence in economics), Humberto Maturana

and Francisco Varela (*autopoiesis*) (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, pp. 23-4) and Robert Axelrod (co-operation and competition) (Axelrod 1997; Axelrod & Cohen 2000). Complexity science is also related to research in chaos theory.

Systems approaches discourage the overemphasis of either the individual or the environment and allow for the analysis of social actions within and across systems with particular emphasis on the interconnections (Healy 2005, p. 146; Ison 2008, p. 140). As Eve Mitleton-Kelly states: 'The theories of complexity provide a conceptual framework, a way of thinking, and a way of seeing the world' (2003, p. 26). A complex systems approach assists in research concerning both individuals and social structure and it 'does not deny the significance of the self-reflexivity of the human subject while yet theorising changes in social totality' (Walby 2004, p. 3). This makes this approach useful for theorising and researching the origins of a social structure of paranoid nationalism and fear of otherness as well as for understanding their effects on individuals and groups.

According to Sylvia Walby 'complexity theory offers new ways of thinking about some of the classic dilemmas in social science, in particular, engaging the tension between the search for general theory and the desire for contextual and specific understandings, which lies at the heart of the tension between realist and post modern approaches' (Walby 2004, p. 2). The previous section has identified the significance of social structure in the form of manifested collective ideas in laws and regulations as well as psychological aspects, such as a fear of otherness, as drivers that nurture a system of exclusion discriminating against First Nations Australians and migrants. This network of theories is well suited to understanding the causes and effects of these phenomena. At the same time, complexity theories de-emphasise the focus on single cause effects and linear cause-effect relationships. Given the long history and numerous changes in policy and attitudes towards First Nations Australians and migrants, described above, this approach is better suited to providing a more nuanced understanding of the situation.

Mitleton-Kelly (2003, p. 24) identifies the following characteristics of what she calls complex evolving systems in organisations and complex human social systems: self-organisation, emergence, connectivity, interdependence, feedback, far from equilibrium, space of possibilities, co-evolution, historicity and time, path-dependence and creation of new order. She argues that these characteristics are common to all natural complex systems and can (to some degree) be applied to relevant or appropriate social systems (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 25). While it would be impossible to explore all of these concepts in this chapter, this thesis will focus on the characteristics most helpful to the research aim,

including self-organisation, emergence, connectivity, interdependence, feedback and historicity.

Complex behaviour arises from the interactions and relationships of agents within a system and between a system and its environment. In complex social systems this means that decisions or actions by individuals (as well as groups, organisations, institutions, communities or societies) may also affect related individuals and systems (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 26). The impact on the individual depends on its history and constitution. These system effects are non-linear and unpredictable, because they emerge from the large numbers of interactions in the network of agents and are therefore often indirect, mediated and delayed. This makes it impossible to predict results in social systems purely by focusing on individual actions (Jervis 1997, p. 29). Another central concept of complex systems science is the idea of feedback loops. A change in one agent or relationship often alters others, which then affect the original agent again. This feedback can be either positive and self-amplifying, or negative and dampening (Jervis 1997, p. 125). With regard to conflict situations which have been going on for many years and seem resilient to change and intervention, Peter Coleman et al. argue that conflict progresses towards intractability as the elements relevant to the conflict self-organise into a structure and become connected by positive feedback loops. A balance between positive and negative feedback loops is necessary for effective self-regulation and social regulation within a system (Coleman et al. 2007).

A commonly cited mechanical example of feedback is the thermostat in a heating system which monitors the room temperature. If the temperature falls below a certain level, the heating is switched on to warm the room. If it reaches another pre-determined level, the heating turns off until the temperature falls below the desired level. What is at work here is negative feedback which dampens the heating or cooling process. Positive feedback, on the other hand would progressively widen the gap between heating or cooling (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 37). In a human system positive feedback amplifies certain behaviours by providing rewards and encouragement while negative feedback dampens behaviours through expression of different views, sanctions or discouragement. Positive feedback can lead to instability while negative feedback absorbs changes in the system (Miller & Page 2007, p. 50).

The strength of feedback in a social system is also dependent on the degree of connectivity between individuals which affects actions and behaviours (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 38). Because of the myriad of interactions occurring between the different agents

within the system and between the system with its environment, certain recognisable patterns develop. Complexity researchers speak of so called ‘emergent properties’, qualities, or structures. They are greater than the sum of the individual parts. This process of self-organisation, or *autopoiesis,* is called ‘emergence’ (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 40). Jeffrey Goldstein (1999, p. 49) defines it as ‘the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns and properties during the process of self-organisation in complex systems’. This thesis argues that it is the process of social emergence that produces discourses in society, and attitudes such as the racist and discriminatory discourses identified in the first part of this literature review, which hamper the engagement of white settler Australians with First Australians, migrants and refugees. Discriminatory policies, such as the White Australia Policy, or the current draconian detention procedures for asylum seekers arriving by boat, are connected with an underlying paranoid nationalism and fear of otherness in positive feedback loops. This contributes to an understanding of how a recent tightening of immigration laws, combined with forced turnaround of asylum seeker boats, still garners broad public support despite consistent media leaks about the inhuman conditions in asylum seeker detention camps and the injury and deaths among inmates. From this framework, a strong attractor in the form of fear of otherness and paranoid nationalism drives the current Australian social system. Reports about atrocities or calls for more humane treatment of vulnerable people - which constitute negative feedback loops - are ignored or dismissed as forgery. These negative feedback loops are not strong enough to change the overall system attractor against the history of fear and nationalism, which has shaped the experiences of the Australian public. This complexity-based analysis of the Australian history of multiculturalism will be further developed in Chapter Three on the basis of Coleman et al.’s Attractor Landscape Model (Coleman 2011; Coleman et al. 2007).

Complex systems theories are not only useful in mapping or analysing social phenomena. The theory of emergence can also be utilised to affect social change and to change these discourses within smaller and larger groups that are part of the social system. According to the work of Keith Sawyer (2005, p. 215), a scholar working on research into creativity and emergence, social structure can be created through the interactions of individuals. These interactions are constrained by existing social structure and at the same time produce new social structure. Sawyer’s theory of emergence also helps in conceptualising how small-group interactions, for example the interactions of participants in a dialogical action research inquiry, can create new social structure and therefore social change outside this micro-system. This question is one of the key

questions of social science and social emergence theory offers a useful premise to explain this link.

2.3 Social emergence in complex multicultural communities

Social emergence theory can be located in the field of 'third wave' systems theories and provides a framework for understanding how the interactions of people in communities create macro-level patterns and how these macro-level patterns in turn influence individual behaviour and interaction. The roots of modern 'third wave' emergence theory are shown in figure 2.1 below:

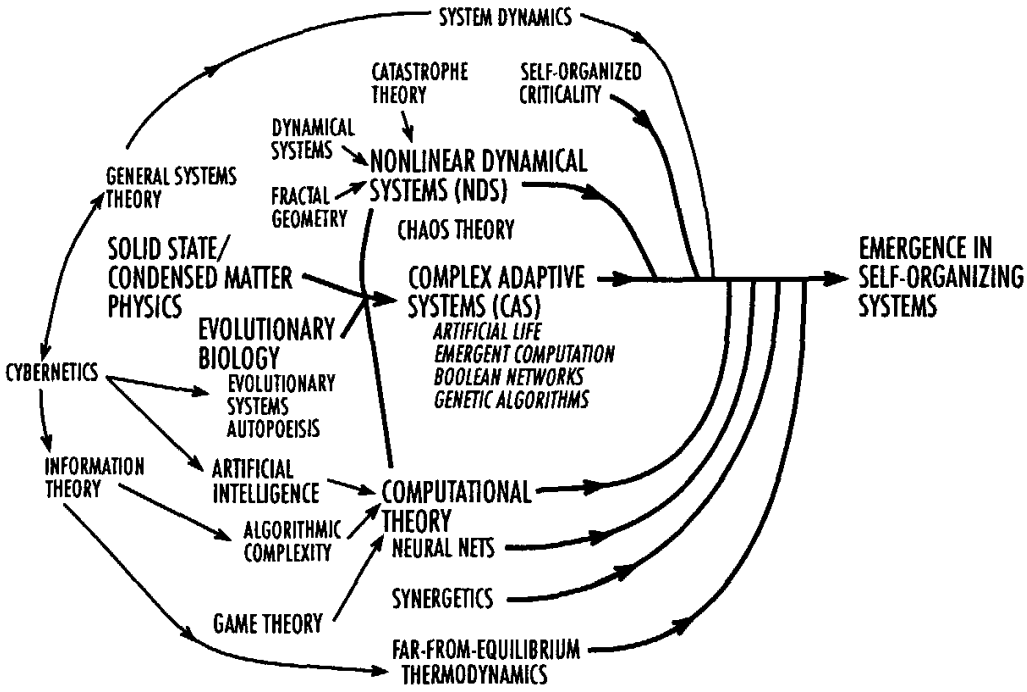

Figure 2.1: Mathematical and scientific roots of emergence (Goldstein, 1999)

Francisco Varela, a Chilean biologist, philosopher and neuroscientist, argued that emergence is 'the *transition* from *local* rules or principles of interaction between individual components or agents, to *global* principles or states encompassing the entire collection of agents' (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 41). The relationship between individual interaction of people as micro-events in the system and the social patterns these interactions create works in both directions. Micro-system interactions create global patterns, but they are also influenced by the global patterns that were previously created. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1984, p. 300) noted that in evolutionary theory macroscopic structures which emerge from microscopic events modify the same microscopic mechanisms (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 41). This process is called co-evolution. Emergence in a human

social system can create new and stable structures, ideas, relationships and organisational forms which then become part of the history of the individuals, groups and institutions that they are part of, and in turn affect the evolution of those entities (Mitleton-Kelly 2003, p. 42). This includes the generation of new knowledge, new and innovative ideas, action plans and other outputs of group or teamwork. Often these ideas are not just the sum of the individual ideas already present in the group, but are created through combination and through creative innovation when one idea sparks an entirely new idea, so that the result is unexpected and creative. Emergence does not have to always lead to desirable and generative outcomes. The results of emergence can be biased, fragile or maladaptive. In the context of this thesis, this means that the patterns of racism and fear of otherness can be the result of emergence processes in Australian communities. On the other hand, this also means that communities can develop different discourses, such as a discourse of welcoming the stranger. The idea of emergence is a core concept of this thesis and is used to explain the link between the transformations happening within the small dialogical inquiry group and their impacts on peer networks of participants and wider community. This relationship is explored in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis which discusses the conceptual framework based on social emergence theory.

This thesis has mentioned the word ‘community’ a number of times. Authors are understandably cautious about proffering a single all-encapsulating definition of community. The preference in the literature is therefore to identify parameters or qualifiers that assist in determining or examining membership. Jim Ife and Frank Tesoriero, for instance, utilise concepts such as human scale, identity and belonging, obligations, *gemeinschaft* - in Tönnies’ (Ife & Tesoriero 2006, p. 18) sense - and culture as parameters to describe community. Communities have also been differentiated in geographical and functional ways (Ife & Tesoriero 2006, p. 96). Peter Westoby and Gerard Dowling (2013, pp. 5-8) highlight the dialogical nature of communities and suggest four distinct but interconnected ways of understanding community within the context of ‘development practice’: as hospitality towards strangers; as ethical space that intends to re-socialise development; as *communitas* of unity in diversity; and as collective practice of processes for social change. The last element also resonates with Ingrid Burkett’s call for a post-modern understanding of community which emphasises processual creation rather than a fixed description. Community is a ‘constantly shifting and changing process, one which is contextual, complex, unstable, uncertain and is always conceptually and practically contested and contestable’ (Burkett 2001, p. 237). This definition makes community the subject of human agency and human agents actively create and continually recreate the

meanings of community (Burkett 2001, p. 237). This understanding of community is well-aligned with the idea of complex social systems. In the community development field Alison Gilchrist (2004, p. 86) points to the complexity of community environments characterised by interpersonal connections, fluid networks and small-scale, self-help groups and organisations. Community becomes an experience or capacity that emerges as a result of the interactions within a complex web of overlapping network (Gilchrist 2004, p. 119).

These post-modern descriptions of communities fit the criteria of a 'complex social system' (Prigogine & Stengers 1984, p. 312; Sawyer 2005, p. 5). As such, complex multicultural communities are made up of many components that interact in densely connected networks. Global system functions cannot be localised to any one subset of individuals or groups but rather are distributed throughout the entire system. The overall system cannot be decomposed into sub-systems and these into smaller sub-subsystems in any meaningful fashion, and the components (i.e. individuals) interact using a complex and sophisticated language. Complex social systems are never fully separate from other complex social systems, often they are nested within each other. Fritjof Capra (2002, p. 83) refers to the network of communication which recursively produces and reproduces itself in the social system as *autopoietic*. Multiple feedback loops of communications produce a shared system of beliefs, explanations and values among a group of people which gives them identities, and creates flexible boundaries delineated by expectation and self-identification. In short, the multiple feedback loops occurring between people as agents in contemporary communities create these shared belief systems or cultures and help individuals identify with in-groups and differentiate themselves from out-groups.

The communities which this research project connected with, fit well into the descriptions of Sawyer and Capra. Research participants belonged to different cultural communities (Aboriginal, Rohingya, South Sudanese and others) but they were also characterised by their own individual backgrounds and experiences (experiences as refugees or professional migrants, growing up in Australia and others), their personal and professional networks (elders circles, family, police, academia, community development work, refugee community groups and others) and shared and different goals (such as build better connections between different communities, assist their own community organisations to deal with current problems, and interest in constructive multiculturalism). Some research participants knew each other before they were recruited, others did not. Most participants were recruited from a dialogical community event which will be described

in Chapter Four when the research methodology is discussed. Throughout the research project, it became obvious how important their personal backgrounds and stories were for the dialogical experience and how their personal peer networks created pathways of influence for social change. Therefore the definition by Alison Gilchrist referred to above describes well the complex web of relationships and agents that the research participants were embedded in and which existed at the 'edge of chaos'.

2.3.1 Critique of complex systems theories

Complex adaptive systems science is not uncontroversial in sociological literature. Healy (2005, pp. 147-8) summarises some of the main criticisms: there exists a lack of clarity about core systems concepts, in particular, such as what constitutes a system and what the boundaries are. This leads to the reliance on central claims derived from systems theories, such as the claim that all parts of a system are complexly intertwined and that changes in one part of the system inevitably lead to changes in other parts without any external justification of these claims. In addition, the concepts that complex adaptive systems science is based on, often require the use of advanced mathematics which may alienate practitioners in the social sciences. Thirdly, systemic perspectives provide little guidance on how to move from holistic analysis of the situation to systemic intervention. All three waves of systems science help to understand the individual in its environment as a unity, but in order to develop actionable concepts this unified structure may need to be broken down. Glenda Eoyang responds to the last point and suggests that not all action interventions require a deep understanding of the non-linear mathematics of complex adaptive systems. Practitioners can make use of surface-level phenomena, such as pattern recognition, to diagnose complex social systems from a systemic perspective and use tools such as descriptive or dynamic metaphors for systemic interventions (Eoyang 2004, p. 57). Burns (2007) and Midgley (2000) both address the issue of boundary critiques of systems and how to define where a system starts and finishes. According to Burns (2007, p. 22) the notion of a whole system is illusory and only useful as long as researchers and interveners interpret it as an attempt to see more of the whole rather than attempt to see the whole. This acceptance of partiality then makes decisions about systems boundaries possible and meaningful. Boundaries are meaningful when they allow researchers and interveners to see 'enough' of the system and to 'understand' enough to make sense of systemic patterns and effects.

Midgley (2000, p. 137) refers to Churchman's discussion of boundaries in his work on improving social systems. According to Churchman, boundaries are social or personal

constructs that define the limits of the knowledge that is to be taken as pertinent to an analysis. Setting boundaries to improve social systems involves a value decision about what knowledge is considered pertinent and who the people are who generate that knowledge. When systems scientists argue that it is impossible to see the system as a whole, this does not lead to pure relativism or the argument that no knowledge is possible. Limited knowledge does not mean no knowledge and to talk about the complex world as if it could be understood clearly is a contradiction in itself (Cilliers 2005, p. 260). According to Walby (2004, p. 7) 'the solution to this problem is to consider that each system has as its environment all other systems'. She wants to replace the notion of a hierarchy of sub-systems with a more fluid conception of the mutual impact of separate systems that co-exist next to each other and are interconnected.

The conceptual basis has three components: connectivity, fluidity in boundaries, and the non-imposition of artificial boundaries. The practical impact of such a view will be explained in Chapter Four which introduces a systemic action research methodology. This methodology helped to recognise the research participants as members of various social groups, networks and organisations that overlapped and impacted on their behaviour and input into the dialogue process. At the same time, the dialogue participants created new ideas and social structure through their interactions, which then emerged outwards throughout their peer networks.

2.4 The value of dialogue

In the previous section on critiques of complex systems approaches it was mentioned that critics emphasise how difficult it is to operationalise complex systems theories. One approach that is frequently connected with systemic methods of facilitation and intervention is dialogue processes and dialogic facilitation methods (Coleman 2011). Two authors who advocate the use of dialogue processes to overcome fear of otherness are W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn. In their seminal work *Moral conflict: when social worlds collide* they argue that human beings have an innate need to associate with others in community and these communities define themselves by creating boundaries and differentiating themselves from outsiders (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997, p. 108). In this process stories of 'us' and 'them' develop and are told and retold - the positive feedback loops identified above. These stories help to develop a sense of self, a sense of what is the right way to live and a sense of how to relate to other people (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997, p. 109). Conflicts between groups and individuals can develop, when these stories clash with other stories. When this happens, people identify fundamental differences in the way they see

the world and designate these differences not as opportunities for learning, but as problems. Pearce and Littlejohn (1997, p. 111) present five patterns which govern relationships across difference, reproduced in table 2.1 below:

Pattern	*Orientation to difference*	*Orientation to communication*	*Orientation to change*
Pattern 1	Absent or inconsequential - monocultural state in which difference is not acknowledged.	Celebration of similarity	Change resisted
Pattern 2	Acknowledged and sought - difference is seen as an opportunity for learning and people are willing to change their own stories.	Celebration of difference	First-order change desired
Pattern 3	Acknowledged and problematic - difference is seen as a problem and the other people or groups need to be persuaded that their stories need changing.	Persuasion	Attempt to change the 'Other'
Pattern 4	Major obstacle and essence of relationship - difference is seen as unbridgeable and the stories of the other people need to be suppressed or eliminated	Frustration, diatribe, force and violence	Attempt to suppress or eliminate the 'Other'
Pattern 5	Difference and similarity acknowledged and valued - development of new categories of thought which do not necessarily pit the groups or individuals against each other, acknowledgment of similarity and difference	Dialogue	Open to second-order change

Table 2.1 Patterns of engaging difference

While patterns one to four either signify an ignorance of difference or an attempt to dominate otherness, pattern five refers to the practice of dialogical engagement in which difference and similarity are acknowledged and transcended. In their book *Moral Conflict* the authors describe a series of public dialogue projects, such as the Public Conversations Project which brought together pro-life and pro-choice activists (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997, p. 181). These projects suggest that dialogical engagement can assist participants to build relationships, develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of social problems and

to generate conditions for non-violent social change. However, the dialogue methods themselves vary considerably and therefore the question remains: what is meant by the elusive descriptor of dialogue?

2.4.1 Definitions of and approaches to understanding dialogue

While dialogue has long been an object of reflection and scholarly engagement, definitions and approaches vary greatly. Dialogue can be considered from a historical perspective, as a description of process or experience, or from a normative perspective, as an ideal and subject of philosophical reflection (Maranhão 1990, p. 5; Westoby & Dowling 2013, p. 4). In the descriptive tradition dialogue refers to communication between two individuals who share a common background of sociocultural tradition and immediate interests, who talk to one another by means of a common language and whose conversation either presupposes or aims at consensual understanding of meaning (Maranhão 1990, p. 5). From a normative philosophical approach, the subject's identity is disclosed when she or he expresses herself. From Socrates to Gadamer, equal and symmetrical participation and commitment to dialogue are considered to be indispensable conditions for dialogue as an ideal (Maranhão 1990, p. 8). While equality of participation, goodwill in the sense of good listening and the goal of grasping a totality of meaning are unachievable, they are still worthwhile striving for (Maranhão 1990, p. 8).

According to Bela Banathy and Patrick Jenlink dialogue is a 'culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions' (2005, p. 4). It includes notions of community, mutuality and authenticity and aims to establish an egalitarian relationship (Banathy & Jenlink 2005, p. 4). Banathy and Jenlink's definition, while mostly empirical and descriptive also includes the idea of equal participation. Dialogue has its roots in Western culture and can be traced back to Socratic dialogues by Plato (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 200) and the root of the word dialogue itself, which stems from the Greek word 'dialogos'. 'Dia' meaning 'through', and 'logos' meaning 'the meaning of the word'. This refers to the stream of meaning which flows between and through dialogue participants (Bohm 2004, p. 6; Dessel, Rogge & Garlington 2006, p. 304). Intergroup dialogue is a facilitated group experience which aims to give participants a safe and structured opportunity to discuss and explore different views about social issues (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 201).

Conflict resolution and peacebuilding practice has adopted a mainly descriptive view of dialogue. Although not a problem-solving or conflict resolution technique per se,

dialogue processes are used in a wide variety of conflict and post-conflict settings to assist in conflict transformation and reconciliation, ranging from community-level processes to Track One diplomacy (Ropers 2004, p. 2). Pruitt and Thomas (2007, pp. 188-213) provide an extensive overview of public dialogue projects since 1994. Their definition views dialogue as 'processes that are open, sustained and flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts. It [dialogue] can be used to achieve consensus or prevent conflict - a complement to, not a replacement for, democratic institutions such as legislatures, political parties and government bodies' (Pruitt & Thomas 2007, p. 1). This description of dialogue is very broad and can include processes such as negotiation, mediation and other conflict resolution conversations.

Dialogue can be transformative, generative or strategic. It is collective communication that allows for the sharing of thought, can transform existing beliefs and create new innovations and cultural artefacts (Banathy & Jenlink 2005, p. 5). Dialogue also allows participants to examine and share preconceptions, prejudices and the characteristic patterns that lie behind their thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings and roles (Bohm et al., 1991). The basic idea is to suspend opinions as well as judgment of what others share and to try to gain understanding of their respective starting points. Dialogue is a 'repeated process of reciprocal translation which eventually forges a common meaning and establishes the basis for a new community, which is not equal of the world of either participant in the dialogue but a transformation of the fundamental relationship of the participants' (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2005, p. 294).

***Excursus*: the use of the term culture and cultures in this thesis**

Dialogue processes give participants from different cultural backgrounds an opportunity to understand the influence of existing cultures and the differences that distinguish them without letting a particular culture or cultures dominate the discourse (Banathy & Jenlink 2005, p. 5). Because dialogue lets participants experience each other in context and provides insight into values, logic and stories of the people involved, it can bridge intercultural conflicts and help conflicting parties improve their knowledge and understanding to transform the relationship (LeBaron 2003, p. 256). The field of conflict resolution has consistently struggled with the complexity of what 'culture' represents (Brigg 2008, pp. 26-7). For the purpose of this thesis the anthropologically informed definition favoured by Kevin Avruch is adopted (2000, pp. 343-4): culture refers to 'learned and created derivates of experience that encode life and meaning.' Avruch argues strongly against any reification of culture which is inherent in most positivist approaches that

understand culture as behavioural patterns by which people can be categorised and differentiated. Culture is not homogenous within populations, and individuals possess more than a single culture. It is informed by worldview, changes over time (LeBaron & Pillay 2006, p. 26) and includes more than just surface-level etiquette and communication style (Avruch 1998, pp. 14-6). This definition of culture fits well into the theoretical network of complex systems theories discussed previously. Cultures are expressions of historical narratives created through social emergence processes and define the identities of human beings as well as their belonging to groups and communities. Because social emergence processes are ongoing, these cultures shift and change over time.

Given that dialogue is a difficult concept to define, it is useful to differentiate it from other communication processes, such as small group discussion or deliberation. According to Black, small group discussion can emphasise critical thinking, evaluation of ideas, analysis of evidence and decision making (Black 2008, p. 94). It often involves some form of disagreement, while dialogue emphasises multivocality, open-endedness, human connection and the co-creation of meaning (Black 2008, p. 94). Black warns of overemphasising the distinction and partitioning away dialogue from everyday interaction. She argues that dialogic moments can occur when discussion or deliberation participants engage in storytelling and share experiences (Black 2008, p. 99). Dialogue is also not negotiation or diplomatic discussion, since people involved in such political 'dialogues' are generally not open to question their own fundamental assumptions (Bohm 2004, p. 8). For the purposes of this thesis Black's recommendation to differentiate discussion and deliberation from dialogue, but also not to overemphasise the distinction, is useful. During the dialogical action research inquiry, the researcher deliberately created a space for interpersonal interaction between participants which supported multivocality, relationship-building and co-creation of meaning. Westoby and Dowling (Westoby & Dowling 2013, p. 20) refer to 'practice *given meaning* through practitioner consciousness and their making it conscious in conversation with others' (2013, p. 20). However, this *state of dialogical engagement* was not necessarily maintained for the full time of an inquiry group meeting. It was preceded by periods of greeting, small talk and lay conversation. It was also at times suspended for more strategic discussion and allocation of tasks or planning of strategy. This thesis aims to investigate the argument put forward by Black about storytelling and dialogic moments and will attempt to document the experiences of dialogue participants during such moments. Inquiry participants also often referred to their own experiences during the inquiry group sessions as experiences in the 'dialogue'. This does not

necessarily only refer to dialogic moments or parts of the interaction which approached the dialogical ideals of equal participation and co-creation of meaning. In the following, the theoretical roots of dialogic moments will be further discussed.

2.4.2 Dialogic moments

This thesis is interested in how dialogue can encourage and facilitate individual and social change. Ira Shor and Paulo Freire consider dialogue a 'moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it' (1987, p. 98). They emphasise a relation of co-constituted mutuality which even constitutes social reality (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 63). Martin Buber, one of the most eminent scholars of dialogue, speaks of the following three elements of dialogue:

> […] (a) an awareness that others are unique and whole persons, encouraging a turning toward the other and imagining the reality of the other; (b) a genuineness or authenticity that does not mandate full disclosure, but suggests that dialogic partners are not pretending and not holding back what needs to be said; and (c) a respect for the other that inclines one not to impose but to help the reality and possibility of the other unfold (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 65).

Both definitions emphasise the meeting of minds of human beings and the 'turning to each other'. These moments of mutuality or 'turning to the other' resonate with Emmanuel Levinas' idea of the ethical relationship with the other and the realisation that this relationship also helps to define the self. Levinas writes:

> The face in which the Other - the absolutely other - presents himself does not negate the Same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. This presentation is preeminently nonviolence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As nonviolence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the Same and the Other. It is peace (Levinas 1969, p. 203).

Like Levinas, Buber understands that a full understanding of the other is not possible or even desirable but that an approximation, a turning towards or a becoming other creates a dialogic moment (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 203).

David Bohm (2004, pp. 29-30) notes that this moment of mutuality creates the phenomenon of collective thinking. In contrast to discussion or debate, participants in collective thought build on each other's ideas and add thoughts, ideas and views to a collectively held space of group thought. This allows the group to achieve a more holistic understanding of a particular situation by suspending judgement and understanding what all the different views and opinions mean. Bohm's idea of collective thinking through dialogue also bears similarities to Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2011, p. 361) views on dialogical conversations:

> What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutor's subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know.

Gadamer and Bohm comment on the emergent properties of dialogue and how it encourages the creation of new and innovative ideas through collective conversation. What is significant is the idea that the phenomenon of collective thought can create a state of understanding or communication which cannot be achieved by an individual alone. Only in the dialogic moment of mutuality can this state be achieved.

The emphasis on mutuality and open-mindedness is different from the ideal speech situation discussed by Jürgen Habermas in his discourse ethics. Habermas argues that in an ideal speech situation there is no imbalance of power between participants. They have a perfect discussion in which nobody can force their opinion on someone else (Edgar 2006). If these conditions prevail then any agreements that the participants can come to would be based on rational argument alone. All participants are allowed to voice their views but must also be prepared to have their opinions challenged and changed by the conversation (Habermas 1990, p. 89). While the open-mindedness demanded by Habermas' ideal speech situation bears similarity to the concept of mutuality discussed by Buber and Freire, it is an open-mindedness of pure rational thought and discussion and debate, and not the receiving of the other imagined by Buber and Gadamer in particular. It also focuses on agreement and maybe even negotiation and not the emergence of new ideas through collective thought envisioned by Gadamer and Bohm. Habermas' view of dialogue as ideal speech is more akin to the description of discussion or deliberation introduced previously. Here dialogue is about a rational argument which changes views but not an inclusive collective dialogic space of group thought. Habermas' work provides important notes on the conditions when dialogue can occur. While ideal speech is considered unachievable, Habermas suggests that communication does presuppose openness and transparency (Edgar 2006). Cissna and Anderson reflect on the famous dialogue of Martin Buber and Carl Rogers in which both discuss whether dialogue can occur in the professional relationship of psychotherapist and client. Buber and Rogers agree that dialogic moments are rare and that they are not sustainable throughout a dialogue process. In spite of this dialogic moments are the turning points, according to Rogers, 'where people are most likely to change, or I even think of it as the moments in which people *do* change, are the moments in which the relationship is experienced the same on *both* sides' (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 71). For Buber the essence of these moments was an experience of:

> […] inventive surprise shared by the dialogic partners as each "turns toward" the other and both mutually perceive the impact of each other's turning. It is a brief interlude of focused awareness and acceptance of otherness and difference that somehow simultaneously transcends perception of difference itself (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 74).

For Buber, these dialogic moments were fleeting and rhetorical relationships are always limited by incomplete mutuality. While he acknowledges that dialogic moments can happen in unequal relationships or random encounters, such therapeutic relationships between therapist and client, relationships between student and teacher and even random encounters between people in an air-raid shelter, they are short and difficult to grasp (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 76). Both, Buber and Rogers, stressed the importance of listening in dialogue. For Buber it was the 'turning toward' the unpredictable and mysterious others. For Rogers it included openness to new surprises, unexpected twists in conversation, and most significantly, empathy (Cissna & Anderson 1998, pp. 87, 92).

The views and arguments presented in this section show that some of the most revered scholars and practitioners of dialogue place emphasis on the phenomenon of dialogic moments. While they are difficult to sustain and even more difficult to capture, they are the turning points in which dialogue can change attitudes views and relationships. When connected to the theory of social change based on the concept of social emergence presented in this chapter, dialogic moments are short periods of time within a dialogue process in which new ideas are born and social change is initiated. This thesis intends to apply the thoughts of Buber, Rogers and Bohm towards the data collected during the dialogical research inquiry to further develop theory about the nature and conditions of dialogic moments.

2.4.3 Critique of dialogue and dialogue processes

Dialogue as process for conflict resolution or space to exchange views and understand political and social problems is not without critics. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall address the inability of dialogue as a conflict resolution technique to address what they call linguistic intractability and radical disagreement. They argue that radical disagreement is discounted in dialogue for mutual understanding and that dialogical practices aim to replace competitive debate with problem-solving and other approaches seeking mutually beneficial outcomes (Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 2011, p. 376). They suggest instead to use *agonistic dialogue* which does not aim to transcend radical disagreement, but instead acknowledges the incommensurability of the positions of conflict stakeholders and encourages them to engage in strategic dialogue to further improve and

safeguard their different world views (Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 2011, p. 380). A key scholar suggesting an agonistic approach is political theorist Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe's concept of agonistic politics is based on Levinas' and Derrida's idea that the constitution of identity requires difference from the 'Other' or the exterior (Mouffe 2013, p. 5). In the political sphere this leads to a fundamental relationship of 'us' versus 'them'. Any kind of political order imposed to regulate this relationship is then considered hegemony. Mouffe argues that it is a failing of liberal political thought to recognise this fundamental and potentially antagonistic relationship with the other. For her, political consensus achieved through dialogue or rational synthesis of views is unrealistic and unachievable (Mouffe 2013, p. 3). Mouffe concludes that a well-functioning democracy is not built on dialogue but on a confrontation of democratic political positions. Too much emphasis on consensus leads to apathy and to a disaffection with political participation (Mouffe 2013, p. 7). This thesis argues that both Ramsbotham et al. and Mouffe confuse mutual learning and emergence of new ideas with negotiated agreement as the goal of dialogue. They see the synthesis of views achieved through dialogical conversation as consensus agreements and not a fundamental transformation of dialogue participants that leads to a new social reality (in the sense of Shor and Freire). Therefore for them dialogue suppresses difference and is seen to be unable to bridge an essentially unbridgeable gap between the self and the other. This is particularly evident in Ramsbotham et al.'s chapter which often posits dialogue next to alternative dispute resolution and conflict resolution which often assume a problem-solving mindset and focus on negotiated consensus agreement (Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 2011, p. 374). Their interpretation of the core features of dialogue lacks the idea of emergence of new ideas similar to Gadamer's idea of the emergence of new knowledge which cannot be predetermined. This is not the hegemonic suppression of difference but the emergence of a new and sometimes consensual reality. What this critique highlights is that there exists confusion about the nature of dialogue and its relationship to conflict resolution processes such as negotiation or mediation, in particular when dialogue is used in a historical descriptive understanding. This thesis aims to develop a more clearly defined understanding of dialogue which addresses some of this confusion.

In addition to the critique from agonism scholars above Coleman (2004, p. 222) also lists more general critiques which are voiced against dialogue and other postmodern approaches to conflict resolution:

- They sometimes engage in abstract intellectualism which is hard to operationalise and may be ill suited to deal with pragmatic real life conflict.

- Dialogue processes are not designed to lead to direct action plans or to organise large numbers of people into action.
- The aim of including as many voices as possible in the dialogue can alienate elites who may play an important role in conflict situations.
- The central ideas of postmodernism and the emphasis on meaning-making, deconstruction and reconstruction through communication have been criticised as vague.
- The transformational level of consciousness required to achieve a state of dialogue is difficult to achieve and sustain during protracted conflict situations.

The dialogue process method used for this action research project addresses many of these criticisms, in particular the inoperability of dialogue. Opportunities for dialogical mutuality were created within a deliberation and action-planning process. In accordance with Black's discussion of dialogic moments in deliberation or group discussion processes, the researcher was able to glimpse dialogic moments within the discussions that took place during the dialogical inquiry sessions. What this thesis is trying to document is the conditions for these dialogic moments and how the new ideas that emerge radiate outwards from the dialogue group into the social networks of inquiry group members. The dialogical inquiry process that was facilitated for this thesis also dealt with practical and tangible issues of concern for the research participants. Their goal was to develop better connections between different communities in Brisbane. While they engaged in a process of deconstruction of problem narratives and construction of a collective narrative, this process was grounded in a specific dialogue and deliberation method, named Creative Dialogue and Design which will be further explained in Chapter Four. Although the positive influences of dialogue on individuals and groups have been researched extensively (Dessel & Rogge 2008; Dessel, Rogge & Garlington 2006; DeTurk 2006; Schoem & Hurtado 2001) the question remains how exactly dialogue processes can contribute to positive social change in larger groups, communities, institutions and social structure beyond the dialogue group (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 241). There exists a lack of research and theory to clearly make this link, and this thesis hopes to contribute to the better understanding of this relationship.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has established the theoretical foundations of the research project. It has discussed the origins of discourses about multiculturalism in Australia and also the relationship between First Australians and white settler peoples. It was found that critical theorists in both fields argue for a dialogical approach to relationships which allows a

becoming of the other and a constructive engagement across difference. This is often hampered by a fear of otherness and a paranoid nationalism rooted in historical narratives and events. To explain the development of these historical narratives and the strength that they hold over the actions and reactions of members of a society, a theory from the field of complex systems science was introduced: the theory of social emergence. The chapter traced the history of complex systems science and found that it does not encourage a particular dominant theory but that it is a bundle of different approaches to understanding complex systems in the natural and social worlds. While some systems thinkers rightfully question whether principles originally developed for natural systems should be applied to the social world, an argument was made that human communities are indeed complex adaptive systems and that their systemic properties are what makes it so difficult to predict, plan and implement social change processes.

From this framing the development of contemporary discourse about multiculturalism and the relationship with the First Australians are patterns derived from a history of previous interactions between people in Australian society and its surrounding systems. Current policies, values and public narratives are the patterns that have developed from social emergence processes in this system. These patterns are fluid and constantly changing but geared towards certain attractors, such as a lack of engagement with Indigenous Australia, a paranoid nationalism and a fear of people from non-white cultural backgrounds, in particular asylum seekers and refugees. The patterns within the macro-system of Australian society that emerge from these attractors are the occasions of social and intercultural conflict detailed in Chapter One of this thesis. Because they are derived from individual interactions between the agents in the system, this thesis argues that changes in individual interactions can, over time, also produce new and novel patterns and change the established discourses. While this thesis does not argue that a small-scale PhD action research project will be able to fundamentally change the discourses in Australian society, it will provide insights into the changes resulting from small-group intercultural dialogue within the micro-system of the dialogue group and emerging outwards from the dialogue group within the meso-systems of dialogue participants.

A key process to address the conflict producing attractors is social interaction in small-group dialogue. The chapter has traced the ideas of key thinkers in dialogue studies and dialogue practice and has found that at its core, dialogue is not a negotiation or problem-solving process but a process of co-inquiry in which participants share stories and experiences not to persuade each other of their views but to learn from each other. This

allows a transformation of relationships and the reassessment of value conflicts. Dialogue is about approximating the other without aiming to fully understand or dominate it. It creates collective communication and thought that is unpredictable and allows for the emergence of new and innovative ideas. Crucial to this emergence process are dialogic moments, moments of true mutuality. These are fleeting and hard to capture but can be the key moments that induce change in dialogue participants. This thesis will explore the conditions for dialogic moments and their impacts on the participants of the action research inquiry.

In summary, this research project analyses contemporary Australian society and its intercultural relations through a framework derived from complex systems science. It is argued that this approach is more suitable to understanding complex social phenomena than more traditional reductionist and linear cause and effect approaches. As an action research inquiry, the study utilises a particular process of social interaction, a facilitated intercultural dialogical inquiry, to create knowledge about the experiences of participants in dialogue relating as well as to understand how dialogue processes can facilitate non-violent changes towards more social inclusion and better relationships between people of different backgrounds and origins. It is anticipated that this knowledge will further advance and refine the use of social emergence theory as well as provide insights into what happens in dialogue processes.

3. Conceptual framework: upward and outward social emergence

Following on from the review of complex systems and dialogue literature presented in Chapter Two, this chapter outlines the conceptual framework for the research. The framework makes reference to the Attractor Landscape Model (ALM) developed by Peter Coleman and his colleagues (Coleman 2011; Coleman et al. 2007) to explain how systemic patterns of racism and fear of otherness develop in a society. Past interactions between individual agents in a social system create emergent patterns which form social discourses. These discourses then constrain future interaction and can encourage positive feedback loops which strengthen the particular attractor, or direction in which the system is bound. Based on this theoretical concept, it is argued that changes in interpersonal interaction and communication events, such as the dialogical action research inquiry conducted for this thesis, can create new and different emergent patterns, discourses and systemic attractors.

This thesis examines how the emergence of new ideas, in light of constraint from previous discourses, works. At a more abstract theoretical level this is also a question about how social structure develops from the interactions of agents in a system, and how it constraints future interaction of such agents. This chapter presents a conceptual framework which addresses this question. It is based on the work of Keith Sawyer on social emergence (Sawyer 2005) and of Uri Bronfenbrenner on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

While it would be desirable to be able to investigate the micro to macro link from the dialogical inquiry group to Australian society at large, that is beyond the scope of this research project. Adopting a systemic epistemology imposes several conditions that ought to be made clear at the outset. Under such an approach, systemic patterns cannot be causally reduced to individual interactions and systems effects are mediated and non-linear, as was discussed in section 2.2 of the previous chapter. This means that it would not be possible under a systemic epistemology to prove a strong causal link between small-group dialogue and societal change at a national level. Because of this, the system boundaries of the research project will be drawn around the peer networks as the communities of the research participants, in the sense of Gilchrist's definition of communities as networks of different groups referred to in section 2.3 of Chapter Two of this thesis. The conceptual framework discussed in this chapter provides a theoretical basis for analysis of changes in interaction and the development of collective new ideas within the dialogue group, as well as the impact upon the peer networks of participants

and vice versa. These will be expressed in the research questions at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Conceptualising the development of discourses in complex social systems - the Attractor Landscape Model (ALM)

Peter Coleman and his colleagues at the Intractable Conflict Lab have developed a model to conceptualise intractable conflict situations in complex social systems, which helps to explain the development of societal discourses such as the ones described in section 2.1 of the previous Chapter. They hypothesise that the development of conflict can be compared to a climber in a valley as shown in figure 3.1 below (Coleman 2011):

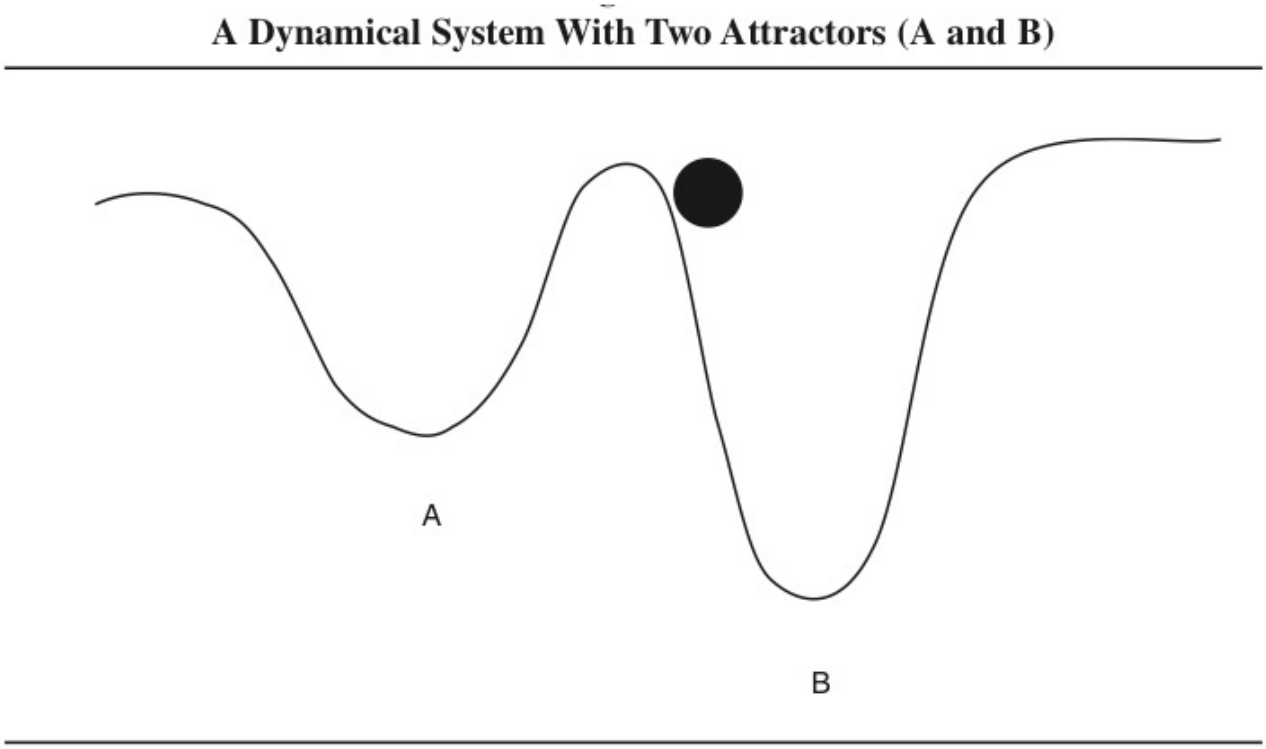

Figure 3.1: Attractor Landscape Model

The hypothesis states that any attempt to move up and out of the valley over the peak requires considerable effort, which means that the conflict or social discourse has become the status quo and is stable and firmly established. The conflict system in figure 3.1 has two attractors, A and B. The deeper the valley, the stronger the attractor and the more difficult it is to escape the pull of the attractor. Psychologically, this translates into strong and immutable convictions about the conflict or social situation among the agents in the system. Wider attractors, such as A, indicate a wider range of mental and behavioural patterns that initiate a movement towards the attractor. Attractors develop through past and current social experiences and interactions. They include past encounters with people

and groups, beliefs, expectations, social norms and the manner in which people have been socialised (Coleman 2011). The White Australia Policy discussed in section 2.1 of Chapter Two is a good example of a positive feedback loop which strengthened a systemic attractor. The policy itself was the product of strongly held beliefs and discourses in white settler Australian society, which emphasised the superiority of white British colonisers and expressed a fear of otherness. This collective narrative manifested in the social structure of an Act of Parliament which then reinforced the fear of otherness and encouraged discriminatory and exclusionary behaviour. It therefore influenced future white settler Australians and contributed to a particularly strong attraction towards the discrimination of First Nations Australians and people of darker skin colour. This thesis therefore argues that the history of colonialism, with its lack of any form of treaty or negotiation between equals which characterised the white settlement of Australia, has encouraged the development of an attractor which to this day instils a fear of the other and a 'paranoid nationalism' in white Australians. This is essentially a reflection of Hage's argument as discussed in section 2.1 of the previous chapter. According to the ALM, this fear of otherness is more similar to attractor A than attractor B in the figure 3.1. Despite it not being strong enough to prevent groups or individuals from escaping it, the attractor is wide and permeates the social structure of Australian society at many levels. This corresponds to the ubiquity of small-scale racism and fear of difference which can often be experienced in everyday discourse in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013, p. 4). It also corresponds to institutional racism in the form of discriminatory laws and policies, as well as discriminatory decisions made in organisations and government (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 47)

Attractors become stronger and weaker through the systemic effect of feedback loops. When different components of an attractor support and reinforce the direction of the attractor the attractor then becomes stronger. This is equal to the systemic effect of positive feedback described in section 2.2 of the previous chapter and results in a *reinforcing feedback loop*. On the other hand, if a component goes against the attractor, for example if it induces a sense of guilt in someone who has engaged in racial discrimination, this acts as a negative, or *inhibiting feedback loop* (Coleman 2011). If attractors have mostly reinforcing feedback loops connecting their different elements they grow and become stronger. The more severe and abundant the negative experiences and encounters that people have in cross-cultural relationships and the more government policy or messages in the media emphasise the problem of migrants or asylum seekers, the stronger the negative attractor grows. Changing strong attractors involves introducing negative feedback loops into the system which counter the positive ones. With regards to

the problem of racism and discrimination identified in this thesis, it means that if these negative experiences could be changed towards more constructive relationships of respect and interest, then the pull of the attractor could also be changed. The following section focuses on the development of constructive and destructive experiences and encounters between people in a social system, and utilises the theory of social emergence to explain how these positive or negative experiences are created in micro-system encounters and how they contribute towards the macro-system attractors that pull the society into a particular direction.

3.2 Upward and outward social emergence

Keith Sawyer, in his book *Social emergence: societies as complex systems* (2005), proposes that sociology should become the study of social emergence phenomena and that these phenomena are at the heart of sociological inquiry. Studying social emergence requires a simultaneous focus on three levels of analysis: 'individuals, their interactional dynamics, and the socially emergent macro-properties of the group' (Sawyer 2005, p. 191). This thesis expands on this notion and examines social emergence processes within an intercultural action research inquiry group (individuals and their interactions) and within the peer networks of participants (macro-properties of the group). Sawyer's theory of social emergence is used to analyse how ideas, frames of interaction, and newly created rules of etiquette and behaviour develop out of the interactions of the dialogical inquiry group participants. Further, social emergence theory also assists with understanding how the dialogical inquiry itself was influenced by the downward causation that participants were under from previous interactions and socialisation.

In addition to Sawyer's work, this thesis uses ecological systems theory by Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain the influence of systems on the social development of children. Bronfenbrenner's conceptualisation of different social systems that individuals belong to and which influence personal development helps to locate the dialogical inquiry group participants within a variety of different meso-systems or peer networks, and help to analyse how these systems impact on the dialogical inquiry and are affected by it at the same time. Sawyer does not differentiate between different peer groups or meso-systems. His work primarily focuses on upward emergence and downward constraint. Given that the dialogical inquiry group was a newly formed small group micro-system and that inquiry group members came from diverse backgrounds and had different peer networks, Bronfenbrenner's work is useful for conceptualising these different peer network circles. I will first discuss the upward emergence processes according to Sawyer and then add

Bronfenbrenner's systems theory to place these emergence and constraint effects in an environment of overlapping and parallel meso-systems that the participants belong to. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to map all of these meso-systems, for the research in this thesis it is sufficient to describe the peer network systems and to identify research participants from these peer network systems who can speak about the indirect and mediated influences of the dialogical inquiry process. This will lead to two research questions focused on upward and outward social emergence within the dialogue group and the impact and influence from the dialogue group to the peer networks.

3.2.1 Upward social emergence

Sawyer has developed his theory of social emergence, articulated in what he calls the Emergence Paradigm, as a synthesis of two opposed paradigms in social science: the structure paradigm and the interaction paradigm. He argues that both mainstream approaches to theorising the micro to macro link in social science are unable to explain the phenomenon and process of social emergence (Sawyer 2005, p. 210). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to reiterate Sawyer's detailed discussion of the development of both paradigms in social science, the main critiques that the emergence paradigm attempts to address are summarised here. According to Sawyer, the structure paradigm which includes structural-functionalism, structural sociology and micro-macro theory either falls into the type of structural determinism, methodological individualism or hybrid theories (Sawyer 2005, p. 192). Because there is no incorporation of theories of process, this paradigm cannot explain the emergence of social structure and its mechanisms or symbolic interaction and the joint construction of social reality (Sawyer 2005, p. 197). The interaction paradigm, which includes ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, interpretivism and structuration theory is a necessary antithesis to the structure paradigm. However, in Sawyer's view, it also falls short because it cannot explain the mechanism between social structure and interaction of individuals (Sawyer 2005, p. 205). Moreover, the interaction paradigm also fails to make clear the mechanism between individual and interaction and how individuals create interaction and are affected by it. On the other hand, it emphasises critical features of emergence such as process, interaction, symbolic communication and social mechanism (Sawyer 2005, p. 210). Sawyer proposes to combine both paradigms into the emergence paradigm to explain how micro-interactions between individuals create social structure and are in turn affected and constrained by social structure previously created (Sawyer 2005, p. 211). What he describes is a process of self-organisation and *autopoiesis* that emphasises symbolic interactions between

individual agents in the system, while at the same time recognising historicity and the constraint of individual agency through previously emerged social structure. This explains the development of social discourses over time and also recognises how these social discourses can influence future interactions and also how they can change again over time.

According to the social emergence paradigm, social phenomena, such as intra- or inter-communal violence or patterns of systemic racism, develop at the level of interaction between individuals and form discourse patterns that emerge into interactional frames, roles and status ascriptions. Through the development stages of ephemeral and stable emergents, such patterns develop into group subcultures, social practices, collective memory and finally into social structures such as policies, institutions and public infrastructure. Simultaneously the higher levels of structure influence the agency and choice of the lower levels, all the way down to the individual level. Sawyer calls this process downward causation or social or downward constraint (2005, pp. 210-25).

According to Fritjof Capra, a physicist and systems scientist who has used complex systems theories to explain social and economic crisis points, social emergence and social constraint processes produce rules of behaviour, a shared body of knowledge, and shared values and beliefs, all attributes commonly associated with group culture. The system of shared values and beliefs creates an identity among the members of a social network, based on a sense of belonging. Because people belong to different social networks, they have different identities because they share different sets of values and beliefs (Capra 2002, p. 87).

The different levels of social emergence and downward causation are presented in table 3.1 below which is based on Sawyer's work (Sawyer 2005, pp. 210-23). The table also provides examples of how the different levels of emergence which Sawyer discusses are related to the research in this thesis:

Level	*Description*	*Example*
Micro-level: individuals and interaction	Social interaction of individuals	Members of the dialogical inquiry group talk about barriers between different cultural communities and how to address them.
Meso-level: ephemeral emergents	Ephemeral emergents are created from collective interaction, and then simultaneously constrain and enable collective action again. Ephemeral emergents include topic, context, interactional frame, participation structure as well as relative role and status assignments of individual agents.	Stories are shared and dialogue participants clarify concepts such as what 'fear of the other or 'need for respect' means. They also develop shared group rituals of greeting and of behaviour during the dialogue.
Meso-level: stable emergents	Stable emergents represent the shared, collective history of a group. Stable emergents of small groups include group learning, group development, peer culture, and collective memory. Stable emergents of an entire society include its cultures and languages. These frames last across more than one encounter of a group.	In the continuing dialogical inquiry the group selects the most important aspects of the problem. Shared definitions are found and the terms generated become imbued with a meaning that is clear to everyone in the group. The group keeps referring to the same terms across a number of meetings. Meaningful stories and contributions are remembered and referred to again and again during consecutive meetings.

Level	*Description*	*Example*
Macro-level: social structure	Stable emergents have become fixed in an objective material form. These include the technological and material systems of society - communication networks, systems of highways and rail lines, residential population distributions, urban architecture, physical locations and distribution networks of goods and services - as well as stable emergents that have become codified externally through writing technology - schedules, project plans, organisational charts, procedural and operations manuals, audit procedures, legal codes and constitutions.	Written action plans, joint statements and declarations or terms of reference adopted by the group. During the research inquiry that was part of this thesis a written action plan and also a report developed from the ideas voiced by dialogue members was created.

Table 3.1: Levels of social emergence

What is innovative about Sawyer's emergence paradigm is the focus on ephemeral and stable emergents at the meso-level. Ephemeral emergents include the interactional frames investigated by conversation analysis. Sawyer (2005, p. 213) explains that:

> In conversation, an interactional frame emerges from collective action and then constrains and enables collective action. These two processes are always simultaneous and inseparable. They are not distinct stages of a sequential process - emergence at one moment and then constraint in the next; rather, each action contributes to a continuing process of collaborative emergence at the same time that it is constrained by the shared emergent frame that exists at that moment. The emergent frame is a dynamic structure that changes with each action.

This explanation of frame emergence is reminiscent of the emergence of collective thought emphasised in Bohm's work on dialogue, discussed in the previous chapter. It is useful to conceptualise what occurs during a dialogical encounter such as the discussion during the dialogical inquiry group that was part of this research thesis. Sawyer acknowledges that it is impossible to clearly identify the structure of a frame at any particular point in time and that it is subject to continuing negotiation and intersubjectivity (Sawyer 2005, p. 213). When these ephemeral emergents are maintained over a series of encounters between the group members, they can form more stable emergents. While Sawyer, possibly influenced by his research work on improvised theatre and frame emergence (Sawyer 2003), considers stable emergents those that last over more than one encounter, he concedes that stable emergents have different degrees of stability ranging

from weeks or months to several years. It is still unclear how ephemeral emergents develop into stable emergents and what conditions enable this (Sawyer 2005, p. 214). The focus on ephemeral and stable emergents provides a vital link between the processes of individual interaction and the development of social structure. They also, as was mentioned above, are well suited to describe and conceptualise the development of collective thought which was highlighted as an important part of dialogue practice. In section 2.4.2 of the literature review in Chapter Two, it was discussed that dialogue processes can encourage dialogic moments and that Carl Rogers argued that these are the moments that change the future behaviour of participants. Applying Sawyer's emergence paradigm to this theory points to an interesting possibility: dialogic moments characterise the moment in time within an interaction process when ephemeral emergents gain a higher level of stability. The thesis will come back to this point in Chapter Five when the changes in interaction and the experiences and reflections of dialogue participants are presented.

What makes the emergence paradigm useful for analysing the effects of the dialogical inquiry in this action research project, is that group interaction is seen as the basis for the development of social structure. The thesis hypothesises that systemic change interventions can also be initiated at this level. By changing the interaction of a group of individuals through a dialogical inquiry process, new networks and relationships are formed, which lead to a change of emergent patterns and have the potential to influence higher levels of the system towards more peaceful behaviours and new social agreements between groups and communities (Pruitt & Thomas 2007: 36). This in turn can lead to new (and now peace-promoting) downward causation. As such, it provides a theory of change for the complex social systems under investigation in this thesis.

3.2.2 Outward social emergence: from micro-system to macro-system

Emergence processes do not just occur upwards and downwards, they also connect the smaller sub-systems with the systems around them. This research draws on Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of human development to explain the process of outward emergence from the micro-system of the dialogical inquiry group, to the macro-systems of communities and society. Bronfenbrenner defines a micro-system as 'a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics' (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 22). The dialogue group in my study is one micro-system in which the individual agents interact. Individuals are also part of meso-systems, comprising of interrelations between

two or more settings in which the individual agent actively participates. This can be family, home, neighbourhood, peer group, community association etc. (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 25). It needs to be recognised that each individual agent will likely be part of different meso-systems, some shared with other members of the dialogical inquiry group, others not shared and therefore what Bronfenbrenner defines as exo-systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 25). Bronfenbrenner's definition of meso-systems fits well with the definition of community developed by Alison Gilchrist presented in section 2.3 of the literature review in Chapter Two, as interpersonal connections, fluid networks and small-scale, self-help groups and organisations (Gilchrist 2004, p. 119). The identification and description of the meso-systems that dialogue participants belong to is therefore an important part of the boundary decisions made during the research design of this project. Given that the project aims to facilitate an intercultural dialogical research inquiry, one boundary is cultural diversity in that participants belonged to different cultural communities. Bronfenbrenner elaborates further that there exists a macro-system, which refers to consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 26). This definition of the macro-system contains similar elements as the macro-structure identified by Sawyer. The macro-system relates to fixed materialised emergents created from interaction in the lower-level sub-systems. It operates at a level of abstraction that is hard to capture with any great detail and therefore best described in more uncertain terms such as culture or society. This thesis will focus on the micro-system of the dialogical inquiry group and the meso-systems of the peer networks of dialogue participants, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. It is beyond the scope of this PhD project to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of the dialogical action research inquiry in a higher macro-system of society at large.

3.2.3 Combined social emergence and ecological systems framework

While Sawyer's research has tracked upward emergence and downward causation in small groups, such as improvised theatre groups, he has not researched outward emergence from a small group into the meso- and macro-systems. Likewise Bronfenbrenner's model cannot capture upward social emergence and downward causation processes. Combining Sawyer's and Bronfenbrenner's work will help refine both theories and construct a more comprehensive theory of how violent and peaceful ideas spread from small group encounters and permeate peer networks, communities and society at large. There exists a gap in the research literature in relation to the link between

small group peace processes and large-scale social change. The research intends to address this by recording and analysing the upward emergence of peaceful ideas from the start of the dialogical inquiry process to the generation of social structure within the dialogue group, and by tracking processes of outward emergence from the dialogue group to the different meso-systems that dialogue participants belong to. Focusing on outward emergence, the study intends to find out if and how any ephemeral and stable emergents, created by the dialogue group, cause the creation and emergence of other ephemeral and stable emergents outside the dialogue participant group, such as among family, friends and peer networks of the dialogue participants; and how downward causation from previous encounters of dialogue members and mediated through their peer networks affects the dialogue process. The combination of Sawyer's and Bronfenbrenner's work is presented in the diagram in figure 3.2 below:[10]

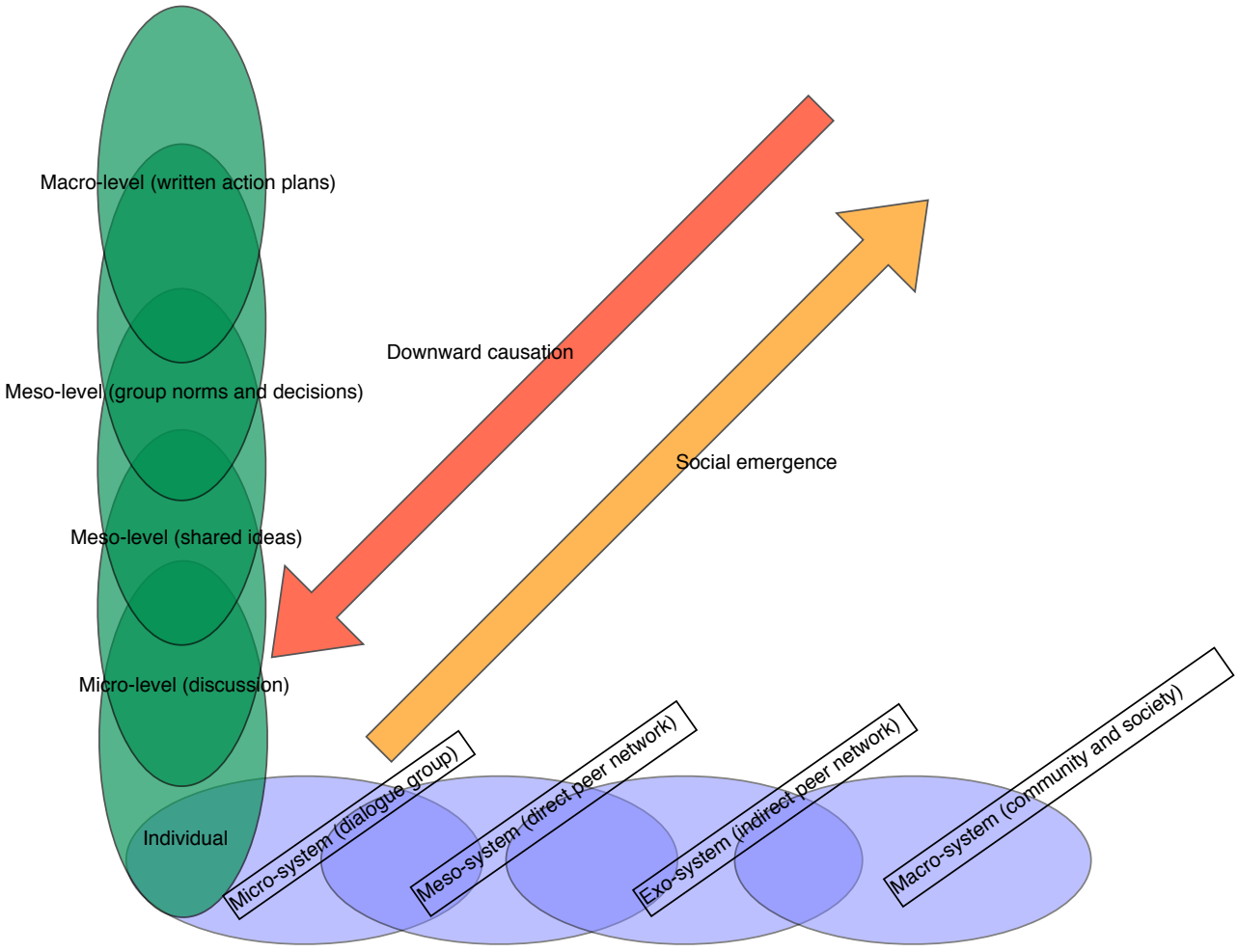

Figure 3.2: Upward and outward social emergence

[10] Visually this framework is inspired by John Paul Lederach's (2005, p. 139) diagram of an integrated peacebuilding framework.

This framework visualises the fluid boundaries between different levels of emergents and also between different levels of sub-systems which inquiry participants belong to. It needs to be reiterated that because some of these systems boundaries are drawn based on the personal experience and decisions of the researcher, they therefore contain value decisions which have an effect on the research.

3.2.4 Epistemological implications and decisions

Sawyer (2005, p. 213) proposes that the emergence paradigm is a 'positivist, objectivist, scientific approach, and consequently it rejects subjectivism and interpretivism.' Simultaneously he acknowledges that the creation of ephemeral emergents is subject to continuing negotiation, irreducible ambiguity and intersubjectivity issues (Sawyer 2005, p. 213). While the emergence paradigm certainly recognises the downward causation from historical social structure, it is the researcher's view that this does not automatically lead to a positivist and objectivist epistemology. Gerald Midgley (2000, p. 123), whose work develops the idea of systemic intervention research based on a systems ontology, suggests that the idea of neutral observation is not congruent with a process ontology based on systems thinking because a systems view of social reality regards everything as interconnected and therefore precludes the possibility of a truly independent observer. Midgley and other systems thinkers argue that there can be no knowledge generation through observation without the existence of a knowledge generating system. This requires observation through the influencing presence of an observer who makes conscious value decisions about the boundaries of the systems being observed and about the purpose of the observation (Midgley 2000, p. 125):

> Scientific observation is not just any observation, but a moment in which the situation is constructed to facilitate the observation under controlled conditions. There are two levels at which this kind of observation is dependent on the involvement of agents within knowledge generating systems: first, in establishing the goals and parameters of the observation; and second, in actually undertaking the observation.

Sawyer (2005, p. 217) also concedes that interpretivists are correct when they claim that complex social systems have a unique feature in the fact that individuals are aware of the social products that emerge from their encounters and internalise the representations of the emergents that they participated in creating. This point is important to this PhD research study, since it allows for an interpretivist epistemology which can include the experiences of dialogue participants as valid sources of knowledge about the creation of new emergents. Another argument which supports an interpretive epistemology while still

drawing from Sawyer's emergence paradigm is put forward by Midgley. That is, in the philosophy of science all theories are necessarily partial, 'and their partiality is a function of the purposes and values of their creators and their communities of users - including epistemological theories which try to specify knowledge generating systems' (Midgley 2000, p. 77). This claim can also be applied to Sawyer's argument for an objectivist and positivist scientific approach to emergence. It allows for the recognition of a multitude of epistemological theories and following on from this, a plurality of research methodologies. This research thesis aims to produce constructive social change through a dialogical research inquiry which helps to bring together people from different cultural communities and which aims to alleviate fear of otherness and social practices of exclusion and discrimination. It employs a dialogical method and aims to investigate the effects, conditions and challenges of this method.

Dialogue processes emphasise the expression and sharing of personal experiences and allow a group to create and negotiate shared understanding. They provide a space for different views of reality. Understanding communities as complex social systems, in which social structure dynamically emerges from individual interactions, emphasises the importance of symbolic interaction in the creation of meaning and social reality (Sawyer 2005, p. 188). New meaning is socially constructed by the individual agents in the social system (Wicks, Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 18). Systems should be seen as a way of thinking about human relations rather than as a map of reality (Burns 2007, p. 22; Midgley 2000, p. 7). This is congruent with the social constructionist view, which posits, that meaning does not inhere in an object, waiting to be discovered, but that it is actively constructed by the discovering mind (Crotty 1998, p. 43; Midgley 2000, p. 123). Interpretivism, as a social constructionist epistemology, studies meaningful social action and aims to discover how social interactions and socially constructed meaning create social life (Neuman 2006, p. 89). The epistemology underlying this research project therefore emphasises an interpretivist approach for understanding social reality embedded in what Midgley , calls a process ontology based on systemic thinking. It allows for a set of research questions which aim to capture the experiences of research participants engaged in dialogical inquiry as well as the micro- to macro-link from dialogue group to community.

3.3 Research questions

The thesis examines the following questions:

I. How do participants in an intercultural dialogical research inquiry process contribute to, experience and reflect on the emergence of new ideas and relationships within the dialogue group?

II. How do participants in the peer networks of dialogue participants (friends, family, work colleagues) experience the effects of the dialogue and how is it affected by these people?

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth discussion of the underlying conceptual framework of the research project. It has drawn on the ALM model developed by Coleman and his colleagues to explain the significant influence of historical social structure, such as discourses of racism and discrimination. It has also provided a theoretical concept to explain that these discourses develop out of interpersonal interactions of people in societies over time. A thorough sociological framework for understanding and analysis of the emergence of social structure from interpersonal interaction to social structure was offered through the work of Keith Sawyer. Because of the overlapping nature of social systems, this framework was combined with Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to explain how different meso-systems of peer networks are impacted upon by new emergents created in micro-systems, such as the dialogical inquiry group convened for this research project. The thesis aims to further develop this theoretical framework by collecting data based on the experiences of members of the dialogical inquiry group, as well as the experiences reported by members of their peer networks. How these research participants were recruited will be discussed in the following chapter which outlines the systemic action research methodology used for the project. The conceptual framework will also be utilised to analyse the data collected and to investigate examples of upward and outward emergence as well as downward causation. As such, it is hoped that the research data will assist in further articulating the theory of social emergence and that it will generate useful knowledge on how dialogical interactions can create new and peaceful emergents and how these can impact on culturally diverse communities.

4. Methodology: dialogical co-inquiry and systemic action research

This research study involved a dialogical action research inquiry with participants who attended a series of dialogical inquiry workshops to address issues of intercultural community conflict and exclusion. The aim of the research was to examine how people from diverse cultural backgrounds and world views jointly develop peaceful ways of interpersonal interaction through dialogue and how the ideas and social habits thus developed - in the form of ephemeral and stable emergents - spread through the wider community. During the dialogical inquiry data was gathered in written form as part of the dialogue process. This data was complemented by focus group and interview data with members of the dialogue group, and members of their social peer networks at different stages. This chapter outlines the action inquiry approach based on systemic action research principles, including its underlying critical interpretivist systemic epistemology. It also provides insight into sampling methods, action interventions and outcomes, and describes the data collection and data analysis methods. Finally it engages with ethical and practical challenges and limitations of the methodology.

In the previous chapter the thesis developed the following research questions:

I. How do participants in an intercultural dialogical research inquiry process contribute to, experience and reflect on the emergence of new ideas and relationships within the dialogue group?

II. How do participants in the peer networks of dialogue participants (friends, family, work colleagues) experience the effects of the dialogue and how is it affected by these people?

In addition to these questions, the research thesis posits that there is a connection between the content of the dialogical inquiry (barriers to inter-communal cross-cultural relationships and how to overcome these) and the process by which this content was created (Creative Dialogue & Design small group dialogue process). The research also investigates this connection.

4.1 Epistemology: supporting non-violent social change through critical interpretivist action research

In section 3.2.4 of the previous Chapter Three, which elaborated on the conceptual framework underlying this research project, the thesis explained why an interpretivist approach to this research embedded in a flexible systems epistemology was adopted. The

research does not just aim to generate knowledge, it also aims to produce social change. The need to address practical problems was first expressed by Kurt Lewin (Lewin 1946, p. 35) who developed the idea that research itself could become a vehicle for social change and social action. The development of dialogue theory was strongly influenced by critical and hermeneutical theory, for example the works of Paulo Freire (1974), Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1990) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (2011). Similar theoretical approaches underlie the premises of action research. There is a desire to change oppressive structures and to address community problems for the benefit of a large group of people. The chosen research methodology of systemic action research aimed to research the effects of dialogue on small groups and communities to develop positive relationships and to encourage individuals and groups to create more social inclusion through strengthened engagement. These aims are strongly aligned with this critical tradition and its aim to promote social justice, inclusion and to decrease oppression and lack of voice. It is the purpose of critical social science to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of social order (Neuman 2006, p. 95). The epistemology adopted for this thesis is therefore best described as a critically informed interpretative approach.

4.2 Approach to action research

4.2.1 Action research and participation

Action research aims to assist with social change processes and to produce practical answers to social problems. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2008, p. 4) assert that:

> […] action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

Participants in this research study were united by the goal of inquiring into barriers which prevented community groups from building better relationships and which led to exclusion, stereotyping and fear of otherness. Participants, both from Aboriginal and migrant communities in the greater Brisbane area, voiced the need to build better relationships and to produce opportunities for constructive meeting and sharing of information during the planning phase of this research project. The action inquiry responded to this need and aimed to produce the practical knowledge needed for individuals and community groups to build better relationships across difference and to conceptualise an inclusive society. The means through which this was facilitated was a

series of small group intercultural dialogue workshops and reflection focus groups with the participants of the dialogue group. The impacts of the action interventions on the wider communities were also explored through interviews with members of the peer networks of dialogue participants, as well as by observing key events of intercultural community engagement during and after the dialogue intervention.

Dialogue (action), focus groups (reflection and abstraction), and adaptation of the next stage of the dialogue process (active experimentation) formed part of an action research cycle in the tradition of Kolb's definition (1984, p. 33) of action learning:

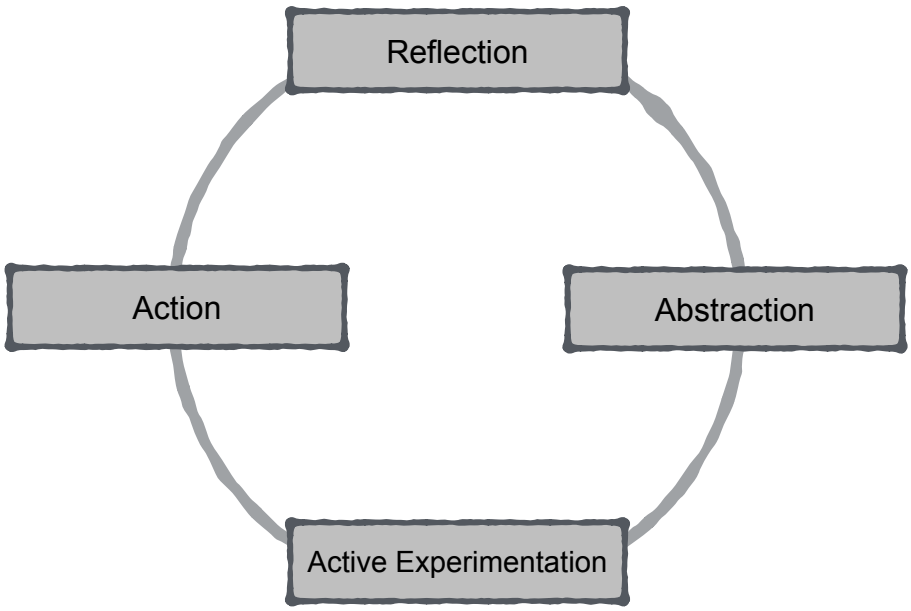

Figure 4.1 Action research cycle

A caveat about action research is necessary here: in light of Reason and Bradbury's definition the researcher does not consider this research project to be 'participatory' action research in the narrow sense of the definition. As the author of this thesis the researcher had ownership of and responsibility for the research process and the outcomes of the study. In the ideal case of 'participatory action research' the research questions, action interventions and reflection methods are developed by the participant researchers themselves, facilitated by the action researcher. The researcher clearly informed the participants that this was not the aim of this research project, as it would have been unethical to then take ownership of the research outcomes. In this study the researcher has offered the dialogical action inquiry process to the research participants in response to an issue of concern raised by them. The overall theme for the action inquiry was suggested by the researcher and aimed to provide better understanding of barriers to intercultural community engagement and to build a vision of how such engagement could

be achieved. The researcher also controlled the dialogue method and the focus group themes. While being flexible, he ensured that they addressed the research questions above.

4.2.2 Systemic action research

Systemic thinking attempts to provide a perspective that takes into account the whole of a situation. It seeks meaning in the complex patterning of interrelationships between people and groups of people (Burns 2007, p. 21). This provides insights into connections that go beyond the individual and allow for the recognition of systemic patterns. However, it needs to be recognised that it is impossible to truly see the 'whole picture', we can only ever see part of the whole (Burns 2007, p. 21). Danny Burns, in his book *Systemic action research: a strategy for whole system change* (2007, p. 7) defines 'systemic action research' as 'a form of action research that locates local action inquiry within a wider system taking into account both the effects that the system has on local issues, and vice versa.' Gerald Midgley (2000, p. 123) highlights the importance of boundary critique (reflection on, and choice between system boundaries), judgment concerning appropriate theories and methods, and action for improvement as the three pillars of systemic intervention. A systemic approach to action research was appropriate to capture the complexity of the multicultural community composition in Brisbane and to understand how individual experiences influence community relations.

As discussed in the literature review, this thesis understands communities in line with Alison Gilchrist's definition, characterised by interpersonal connections, fluid networks and small-scale, self-help groups and organisations. Community becomes an experience or capacity that emerges as a result of the interactions within a complex web of overlapping networks (Gilchrist 2004, p. 119). The research participants involved in the dialogic inquiry group provide a good example of this concept: one participant was an Aboriginal elder in her sixties from the Logan area. She did not know her cultural background until she was well into her forties, was married to a white British migrant, and is now a member of a number of Aboriginal advisory councils. She regularly performs a Welcome to Country ceremony for a Chamber of Commerce and is acquainted with senior federal and local politicians. She is also a speaker for Breast Cancer Network Australia. All these overlapping networks and groups influenced her views on multiculturalism and community connections. Her peer networks also provided her with opportunities and pathways to communicate her ideas and to take action herself.

Systemic action researchers start by constructing ‘a working picture of the multiple systems that we inhabit, from both within and outside them, and then identify opportunities to act within these systems’ (Burns 2007, p. 33). Another important part of systemic action research is what Burns calls ‘resonance’ testing: action researchers create spaces in which they test the resonance of the working picture that the initial inquiry has created (Burns 2007, p. 54). This leads to a multi-stranded inquiry and data triangulation. This thesis has used an approach which Burns has named ‘networked systemic inquiry’ (2007, p. 81) and which involves an initial dialogical co-inquiry, in this case, an inquiry into the barriers to community engagement across culture and intercommunal relations, with a group of interested and knowledgeable research participants. The resonance of this inquiry was tested through interviews with people from the peer networks of the dialogue participants and with community development professionals working with Indigenous and culturally diverse communities. Another strand of the inquiry involved observation of community events at which members of the dialogue group engaged with other groups and organisations. Examples of these included the Independence Day Celebration of the Togolese community in Brisbane in 2011, the Queensland Multicultural Festival 2011, and a meeting with refugee community leaders organised by a settlement service provider.

The inquiry process loosely followed Burns’ design principles for systemic action research including the following (Burns 2007, p. 85):

- an emergent research design (starting with the dialogue inquiry group and then moving outwards into meso- and exo-systems);
- an exploratory inquiry phase (the main dialogue inquiry group);
- multiple inquiry streams operating at different levels (reflections on large community events and small group meetings from participants and the researcher);
- a structure for connecting organic inquiry to formal decision-making (ongoing reflection and decision-making by the dialogue inquiry group on how to affect system changes);
- a process for identifying cross-cutting links across inquiry streams (data collection and analysis using Atlas.ti qualitative research software and presentation of findings to the dialogue inquiry group); and,
- the active development of distributed leadership (members of the dialogue group engaged outside the formal dialogue sessions and decided to continue the inquiry after the data collection was finished).

These different inquiry streams better provided for an overview of the systemic effects of the small group inquiry and allowed for different observation points to be used to test for resonance and to triangulate data than a single inquiry strand could have provided by itself.

4.3 Spinning the inquiry net(work): sampling strategies and participation

According to Norman Blaikie (2000, p. 197) the method of sampling can have a bearing on many other parts of a research design, and these decisions can determine the kind of conclusions that can be derived from the study. Neuman (2006, p. 158) emphasises the importance of social context for qualitative research design. The literature suggests a purposive sampling technique tied to particular inquiry criteria to overcome the problems associated with accidental or convenient sampling of research participants (Babbie 2004, p. 183; Neuman 2006, p. 220). In the case of this research project, the idea for the facilitated action inquiry arose from a number of community events, known as 'Community Cafés Dialogues', which the researcher facilitated in 2010 and 2011. These 'Community Cafés' brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with people from migrant, refugee and mainstream backgrounds and were organised by Brisbane City Council. Over a period of eight months the project brought together two groups of around forty people each and the researcher facilitated three community cafés with each group using the World Café Conversation facilitation method (Brown, Isaacs & Community 2005). Questions revolved around what communities could learn from each other, how to build better relationships and how to deal with community conflict. Out of this process it became clear, that participants identified a number of problems that obstructed their communities and groups from engaging more with each other. For example, the groups identified the following issues:

- How can the new and emerging communities engage further with the First Australians?
- How to share our collective way of living within the mainstream Australian community?
- How can we promote belonging in a diverse environment?
- Learning about what is important to each other.[11]

At the last event with each group, the researcher suggested a continuation of the dialogue through the small group action inquiry and provided interested people with participant information sheets about my PhD research project. Each expression of interest was followed up with a telephone conversation outlining the research study, dialogue method and data collection. After this follow-up conversation and screening process seven out of originally sixteen interested participants gathered for the first dialogical inquiry session in April 2011. After initial questions were answered and each participant had an

[11] These insights and questions were generated during the Community Café dialogues - they were recorded on flipchart paper by the participants, during the first dialogue sessions with each group.

opportunity to consider whether they wanted to participate or not, the group decided to engage in the action inquiry dialogue process.

The participants of the study came from culturally diverse communities and self-identified with a joint perception of a lack of cross-cultural relationships between their communities that they wished to deal with as a group. Some participants had personally experienced situations in which they felt discriminated against by people from other cultural backgrounds. All inquiry group members were genuinely interested in building personal and inter-group relationships to build a more cohesive community. These motives, as well as the different backgrounds of participants, tied in well with the research aim of facilitating and studying a culturally diverse dialogue group. In addition to this, the group make-up and the researcher's choice of dialogue inquiry method also fulfilled the conditions for effective group work and wise decision-making identified by James Surowiecki in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004). These include having a diversity of opinion and access to different kinds of information in the group; individuals in the group need to be able to make decisions independently from each other without being dominated by other members of the group; and decision-making needs to be decentralised without a top-down hierarchy.

The inquiry group showed diversity with regards to age, gender, ethnicity, cultural sub-group, socio-economic background and education. Two participants were married to each other. While power is always apparent in action research inquiry groups, there did not seem to be any undue power imbalance between these or any other participants. During the inquiry process, group members actively attempted to recruit other participants. While two group members dropped out permanently after only one session, four others joined the process at various stages after they had been recruited by other participants. One participant joined the inquiry at a later stage because she could not come to the earlier meetings. This dropping in and out of the inquiry group mirrors the systemic nature of the research and also the dynamic nature of community groups with fluid memberships and networks. Brief de-identified biographies of the research participants are provided in Appendix 1. To maintain confidentiality the researcher has chosen to refer to the participants as D1 to D13.

4.4 Informed consent and action planning

A fundamental principle of ethical social research is not to coerce anyone into participating. As such, the study used a research information sheet and a written consent

form which was provided to and discussed with the research participants prior and during the first inquiry group session. Participants can become aware of their rights to refuse participation when they read and sign a statement giving informed consent (Neuman 2006, p. 135).

4.4.1 Initial information session

At the start of the dialogical action inquiry the researcher conducted an information session in which he explained the research aims, action research cycle, ground rules and dialogue process, voluntary participation and informed consent, and answered any questions of the research participants. After participants had received the information sheet and consent form already two weeks prior to the first session, they signed the consent forms in this session.

4.4.2 Collective planning of the inquiry process

The initial session also provided the opportunity to shape the inquiry questions and to link the small group action inquiry to the large group Community Café event. At the beginning of the first session, participants were asked about their hopes and objectives for participating in this dialogue with their answers recorded on flipchart paper. They included better understanding of community problems and assisting their own communities, learning how to facilitate group dialogue, getting people to listen to stories of newcomers and meeting people from other communities. Other participants wanted to influence media for more positive reporting, learn how to live peacefully together as human beings, develop cultural awareness and support acceptance for people living in diversity and walking together in partnership.

From these objectives the researcher developed a ‘working agreement’ with participants to address issues of confidentiality, participation, respectful communication in the room and how to handle communication between sessions. The objectives and the working agreement framed the ensuing dialogical inquiry. The two inquiry questions which the group wanted to address flowed from the large group Community Café event. Over the course of the next nineteen meetings the dialogical inquiry group discussed the following two questions:

Problem-question: What significant barriers hinder our communities from building better relationships with each other? (Sessions 1-8)

Vision-question: What goals do we need to achieve as a group to build a better Brisbane community? (Sessions 9-16)

After both questions had been addressed and the group had developed visual maps to understand the relationships of the elements brainstormed to answer each question, the group members guided by the researcher, proceeded to develop an action plan for further projects and activities in sessions 17-18. Session 19 was used for a group reflection and further planning. Sessions 20-22 were follow-up sessions in which the group discussed the progress on implementation of action plans. Session 23 was the final participant analysis session in which the researcher presented the outcomes of the peer network interviews and the group analysed them together.

4.5 Dialogical action inquiry through Creative Dialogue & Design (CDD)

The dialogue intervention was facilitated using a process the researcher has come to name *Creative Dialogue & Design (CDD).* It is based on the *Interactive Management (IM)* facilitation method developed by John Warfield at George Mason University and is a well-documented and researched facilitation process (Broome 1995, 1997, 2006; Broome & Christakis 1988; Broome & Jakobsson Hatay 2006; Christakis & Bausch 2006; Flanagan et al. 2012; Laouris, Erel, et al. 2009; Laouris, Michaelides, et al. 2009; Warfield 1976; Warfield & Cardenas 1993, 2002). The terms CDD and IM have been used interchangeably throughout this thesis, acknowledging that the term used in the literature is IM.[12] The use of IM in peacebuilding and conflict transformation was pioneered by Benjamin Broome from Arizona State University, who documented the successful use of IM with Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot citizen groups as part of a multi-year peacebuilding process in Cyprus (Broome 1997, 2009). He also suggested that IM holds the potential for creating respectful intercultural dialogue and design processes, which not only support participants in the planning of peacebuilding actions, but serve as a first step for relationship building and community participation (Broome & Christakis 1988).

4.5.1 Creative Dialogue & Design/Interactive Management

IM is a computer-assisted group facilitation and design process which relies on the principles that dealing with complex and stressful situations in groups and communities requires the exploration of the group members' knowledge and the establishment of

[12] Another version of Interactive Management was further refined by Alexander Christakis. It is known as Structured Design Process (SDP) and uses the CogniScope and Root Cause Mapping Software (Christakis & Bausch 2006, p. 49). Yiannis Laouris and his colleagues at the Neuroscience & Technology Institute in Cyprus (2009; 2009) refer to their version of the process as Structured Dialogic Design Process (SDDP).

sustainable relationships between them. It recognises that groups and communities are complex social systems and that a systemic view is helpful in facilitating changes in complex environments (Warfield & Cardenas 1993, 2002, p. 1). Warfield and Cardenas identify three distinct phases of IM: the planning phase, the workshop phase and the follow-up phase (Warfield & Cardenas 1993, 2002, p. 2). The following description of the IM process focuses on the workshop phase. The equivalent to the planning phase was conducted during recruitment and initial information session, the follow-up phase was incorporated into the reflection focus groups.

During the workshop phase the facilitator guides the participants through a dialogue and design process which is flexible and is based on three distinctive stages: Stage one concentrates on developing greater understanding of the problems as perceived by the group's members. Stage two assists in formulating a group vision by articulating goals the group members want to reach. Stage three allows for prioritisation of projects to ensure that resources are expended where they can have the greatest effect.

The initial stages of each IM inquiry use Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to maximise participant control and input (Broome 1995, p. 207; Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 205; Christakis & Bausch 2006, p. 25; McDonald, Bammer & Deane 2009, p. 68). In this process a 'triggering question' is presented to participants. Each participant, working alone, generates as many ideas to answer this question. The facilitator records these ideas on paper and enters them into the *Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM)* computer software.[13] The paper is posted on the wall. Participants then discuss the ideas to clarify their meaning and finally vote to select the most important ideas (Broome 1995, p. 207; Christakis & Bausch 2006, p. 26). The software input also allows the written recording of the dialogue session as part of the facilitation. The ideas and clarifications can be exported as text documents. In the second step, called 'structuring', the ISM software is used to clarify relationships among the ideas generated from the voting. For example, during the problem-mapping stage the group used the relational question 'Does barrier A significantly aggravate barrier B?' Discussing this question and answering it by consensus decision helped the group build a visual map, or *problematique*, which displayed the relationships (Christakis & Bausch 2006, p. 27). This visual reference map and the record of the dialogue session were then used for further dialogue and reflection. Because the information is generated as standard text files, the clarification progress was exported into

[13] This dialogical inquiry process utilised the George Mason University Version of the Interpretive Structural Modeling Software and the User's Guide written by Benjamin Broome (1999).

MS Word documents, which were then shared with participants during breaks between sessions. These documents were also imported into the Atlas.ti qualitative research software which was used for coding and analysis. Since the recording was part of the dialogue process itself, it was not as obtrusive as audio- or video-recording would have been.

The ISM software provided a linear framework including brainstorming and clarifying ideas, categorising and voting to reduce complexity, structuring relationships between ideas and finally constructing a *problematique* on the wall. It was possible to go back to a previous step in the process to discuss and change the meaning of idea statements. Because everything was recorded using the software, this was much easier than with facilitation processes that just rely on flipcharts or other paper-based recording processes. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that the linear nature of the dialogue and recording process may not have been appropriate for people who were more polychronic or diffuse thinkers and would have found it hard to follow linear processes (LeBaron & Pillay 2006, pp. 40-1). However, feedback indicated that every member of the inquiry group found the process helpful and rewarding. Participants remarked how helpful the structured facilitation was. Although certain parts of the process were regarded as mentally exhausting, the structure provided by the IM process was seen as valuable and positive.

Ultimately a facilitator makes decisions about the discussion structure and encourages certain communication processes such as circle processes (Kraybill & Wright 2006, p. 14), small group discussion or vigorous debate. While facilitating the CDD sessions, the researcher actively encouraged the participants to learn how to use the software themselves and to facilitate parts of the discussion in the room. While not all participants felt comfortable doing so, large parts of the recorded data were typed into the software by the participants. This also helped address the power imbalance between vocal and less vocal group members and to create an atmosphere of collaborative co-inquiry in which everyone present, including the researcher, attempted to understand the problem and vision elements better. Every participant was provided with a CD-ROM copy of the public domain ISM software for their own use.

4.5.2 Data collection during the inquiry group sessions

Conversation data from the dialogue was rendered into textual form using the ISM software and then recorded and stored. In addition, research notes were taken for each of the twenty-three sessions. These research notes focused on the interpersonal interaction

of participants and also included the researcher's own self-reflections on his role in the process. Photos were also taken during the inquiry group meetings. These helped the researcher to remember the room setup and also provided visual information on the participants' emotional states and their body language during the dialogue inquiry. The photos helped to recall specific events mentioned in the notes during the analysis process.

Once the group had created the initial field of ideas for the question at hand, the software prompted participants to clarify their ideas. This was done through discussing and recording the narratives and experiences behind the ideas. IM practice emphasises that initial ideas belong to their creators and their wording and clarification cannot be changed without the consent of the participants who contributed the idea (Christakis & Bausch 2006, p. 26; Laouris, Michaelides, et al. 2009, p. 55). The group generated and discussed sixty-seven problem elements over eight sessions (April to June 2011) and created a problem-map showing the relationships of eighteen elements which had been prioritised as the most important problems. They then generated thirty-two vision elements over eight sessions (July to November 2011) and created a vision-map of the thirteen most important elements. Two sessions were then used to facilitate an action planning process in which the group developed project ideas and action plans to implement their vision. The group discussed the basic elements of project planning (what, who, when, where and how) for each project idea which had emerged throughout the dialogue sessions. The problem- and vision-maps will be presented in Chapter Five which focuses on the experiences of participants during the dialogical inquiry process.

4.5.3 Inquiry group structure, changing participation and information updates

The nineteen initial inquiry group sessions were held in the meeting room of a community centre in central Brisbane from 9.00 to 13.00 on Saturdays. The sessions often started late because some participants arrived late. Around 11.00 morning tea was provided. Because of the staged arrival of participants the researcher utilised the first hour of the session for more informal conversations to build better relationships with participants and to encourage them to learn more about each other. The CDD process started with an acknowledgment of the traditional owners of the land which became an important ritual for participants. The outline of a typical session is provided in Appendix Three. The photos in figures 4.2 and 4.3 show the room setup and the projection of the ISM software:

Figure 4.2: Room setup showing the problem ideas generated by the inquiry group

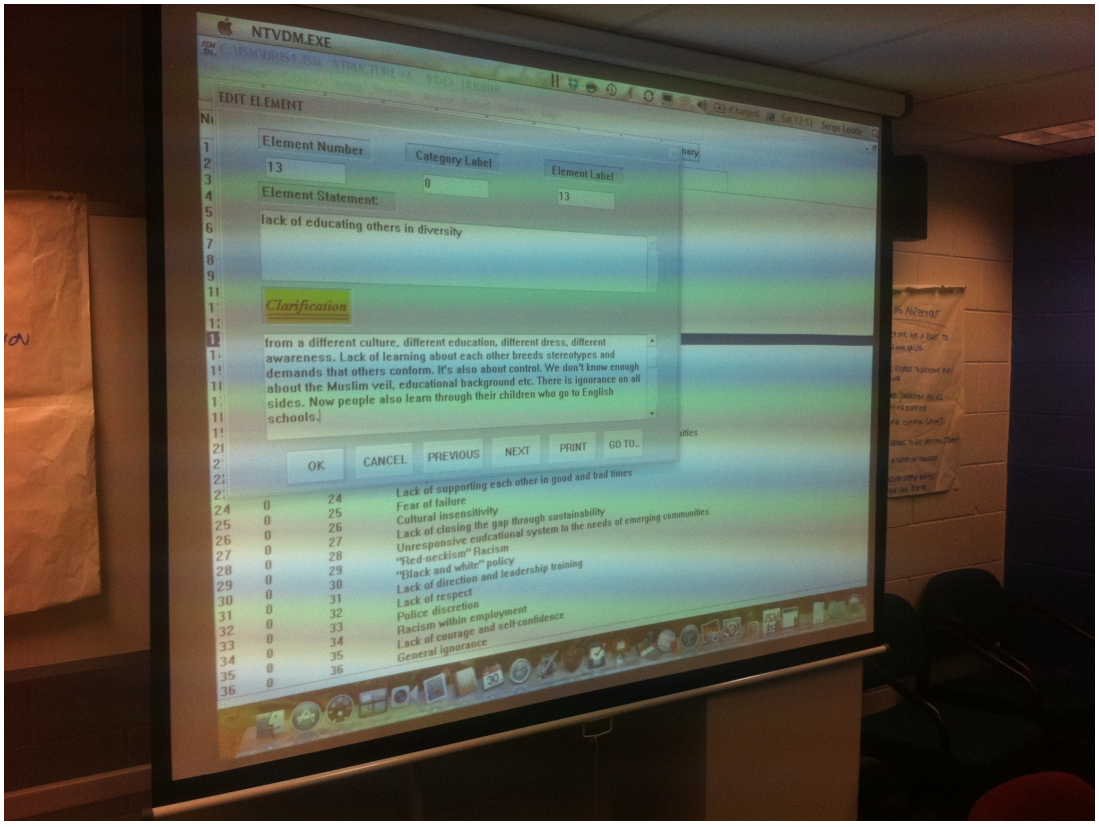

Figure 4.3: Projection of the ISM software and data entry

The first session was attended by seven people. The average participation over twenty-three sessions was exactly four. Three participants only attended one session each

(D1 attended only session 1, D8 attended only session 2, D13 attended only session 13). New participants joined the process in sessions 2, 4, 6, 8, 11 and 13. These participants were able to follow the dialogue because of the textual recording and were given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas and to clarify the ideas of others that they had missed previously.

The duration between sessions was mostly between one and two weeks, with a four week break in June/July 2011. In the week after each session a text document, containing the information that had been entered into the software up until the last meeting, was emailed to the participants. This helped people to keep up with the progress of the dialogue. For the two participants who had no access to email printed copies of the email and the document were provided. Prior to some of the sessions participants were contacted by phone and reminded of the meeting date, especially if more than one week had passed between the meetings. The researcher often received notifications from participants if they could not attend a particular meeting. Except for one, all participants stayed connected with the action inquiry process over the eight months of data collection and beyond.

4.6 Focus group reflections on the dialogue process

The action inquiry was complemented by focus group conversations in which participants reflected on their experiences during the CDD dialogue. Focus groups enable informants to react to and build upon the responses of other group members. This helps to understand the process of social interaction and group dynamics. Focus groups can also provide a safe and culturally familiar context that enables participants to explore sensitive topics (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008, p. 148). The ability to explore participants' perspectives by listening to their conversations makes focus groups very useful for bringing out voices from marginalised groups (Morgan 2008). They are suitable for explaining group processes, in this case dialogue, and make visible the normative understandings that groups draw upon to reach their collective judgments (Bloor, Michael 2001, p. 4). A focus group methodology is well-suited to investigate experiences among dialogue participants, particularly those from non-dominant or marginalised groups (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 229).

On this basis four focus groups and two interviews with dialogue participants were conducted. The first interview was with participant D7 at the beginning of session 2. This interview helped to test and refine the focus group discussion guide. The first focus group

was conducted in session 5, in the middle of the problem-mapping dialogue process, with participants D4 and D7. The second focus group was conducted at the end of the problem-mapping stage in session 9 with participants D2, D7, D9 and D11. The third focus group was conducted in session 17 at the end of the vision-mapping stage with participants D6, D7 and D12. The final dialogue reflection focus group was conducted in session 19 in November 2011 after the dialogue had finished. Participants D2, D3, D5, D6, D12 participated in this focus group. The number of participants at each focus group lies within the optimal range of four to eight participants identified in the literature (Krueger & Casey 2000, p. 73; Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008, p. 153), except for the first focus group which only had two participants.

The original plan was to conduct the focus groups in separate sessions from the dialogue sessions to clearly emphasise the reflective component of the focus groups. This strategy was abandoned for several reasons. Firstly, given the changing levels of participation it was impractical to run separate sessions just for the focus groups. Secondly, and more importantly, the focus groups were part of the dialogical inquiry group process. Throughout the research it became evident that participants did not consciously differentiate between specific dialogue interventions or stages in the process. They viewed the inquiry groups as a continuum of engagement with the aim to better understand the issues identified and to build some joint action plans. While everyone acknowledged that the focus group sessions helped to raise awareness and understanding of the effects of the dialogue, the focus groups were viewed as part of this dialogical inquiry. This view aligns well with complex systems thinking, as in a complex social system, such as the dialogue group, the focus groups were simply another opportunity for social interaction and not a separate observation position in the positivist research tradition. If the researcher had tried to artificially separate them from the dialogical inquiry, it would have been more likely that participants would not have attended the focus groups and would have seen them as superfluous. Dialogical inquiry into intercommunal relations and inquiry into dialogue processes (which were also forms of intercommunal relation) could not be separated easily, and this is reflected in the findings chapters which explore the development of relationships within the inquiry group as well as the insights gained from the dialogue itself. The dialogical inquiry group inquired into barriers of intercommunal relationships between different cultural groups and identified dialogue and opportunity for interpersonal interaction as the most important processes to overcome these. Their inquiry topic therefore was almost identical with their inquiry process and the reflection on their experiences in the dialogical inquiry group itself. The group was investigating the lack of,

and the effects of, sustained community dialogue by utilising a form of this dialogue for the actual inquiry. Therefore the results of the dialogical inquiry process are also part of the research data for this thesis.

Focus groups lasted approximately one hour and twenty minutes each and were audio-recorded using a microphone and laptop as recording device. Audio-recording focus groups gave access to key phrases and stories which were difficult to record without fully recording the conversation. The words that people actually speak often hold important insights that help the group move forward (Burns 2007, p. 152). Although some researchers use video-recording for data collection, researchers such as David Morgan and colleagues (1998, p. 106) and Lia Litosseliti (Litosseliti 2003, p. 53) suggest that that this can obtrusive and may inhibit participants from engaging naturally with each other. At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher clearly stated the beginning of the recording and asked the group for consent, which was stated collectively. The first three interviews and focus groups were transcribed into text documents, the last three focus groups were coded directly into the audio file using the audio-coding feature of Atlas.ti. The focus groups were facilitated according to guidelines by David Stewart and Prem Shamdasani (1990, pp. 66-86) and used a thematic topic guide to frame the conversation. A copy of the topic guide is attached in Appendix 4. Notes were taken during the focus groups to record participant observations and to reflect on the researcher's own thoughts during the focus groups.

4.7 Resonance testing through participant observation and peer network interviews

In addition to the focus groups with the dialogue participants, and to research changes in the peer networks (meso-systems) and communities (macro-system), a number of community events in which dialogue participants engaged with other members of their meso- and exo-systems, were attended by the researcher. These events included the Togolese Independence Day Celebration in May 2011, the Queensland Government Multicultural Festival in October 2011, and a meeting with refugee community leaders facilitated by a settlement services provider in Brisbane in November 2011. Participants D4, D11 and D12 were members of this community leader group and had invited other dialogue participants to share their experiences and ideas from the dialogue. Data was collected by observing the discussions and by asking the dialogue participants after the events about their reflections, which were written up in the researcher journal. The research notes were complemented by photos of some of the events. In addition to these

participant observations the researcher conducted interviews with six peer network participants between March and June 2012. These research participants did not participate directly in the dialogue, they belonged to the peer networks that the dialogue participants were part of. The study used a snowball-sampling method (Neuman 2006, p. 223) with participants from the dialogue group to identify these interview participants. They included a number of community development workers from local council as well as from various multicultural service providers. The interviews focused on research question two. Since the dialogue group decided to share their collective inquiry results with these participants in the form of a report which was edited by the researcher, interview participants were also asked to reflect on the information created during the action inquiry and therefore the data could be triangulated (Neuman 2006, p. 150). The interviews were audio-recorded for more accurate access to the interview content.

4.8 Data storage and analysis: Atlas.ti and collective analysis

Burns suggests that systemic action research should be considered a hub of research methods instead of a research methodology in itself (2007, p. 133). From the 'hub' of the action inquiry group other inquiries are developed, and different methods are used. The data from these inquiries is then fed back to the inquiry group.

Through the action inquiry and its subsequent inquiries at the community events and through the interviews the research gathered the following types of data:

- Dialogue inquiry documents outlining the barriers between communities, goals to build a more inclusive community and concrete action plans for the group. These documents also contain stories and narratives by the dialogue participants and were to a large extent entered into the ISM software by the participants;
- Problem- and vision-maps showing the relationships of the barrier and goal elements that the participants had prioritised. These maps show influence structures with root causes and effects and were created by the dialogue participants using the ISM software. The final graphical representations were developed by the researcher according to the instructions from the software output;
- Researcher notes and photos from the twenty-three dialogical inquiry sessions and the focus groups, community events and interviews;
- Audio recordings of focus groups with dialogue participants and interviews with their peers;
- Notes from other informal interviews with community development workers, phone calls from research participants and notes about important events which I connect with the research;
- Newspaper articles and secondary literature on intercommunal conflict and instances of racism and discrimination in South East Queensland and Australia.

The text data was entered into the Atlas.ti qualitative research software (Bryman 2003). The software acted as a data storage container and data hub to connect the different documents, research note memos, photos and audio recordings. It also allowed the construction of network views to visualise patterns and codes. Data analysis was conducted through using open coding, axial coding and selective coding to generate themes (Neuman 2006, pp. 461-4). Some of these themes were derived from the research questions, for example 'dialogue helps breaking down barriers' or 'experience of racism or discrimination'. The data analysis involved a process of 'analytic induction' in the form of 'successive approximation' (Bloor, Michael 2001, pp. 66-70; Neuman 2006, p. 469). Some codes were generated from the data itself, other codes, such as 'ephemeral emergent'[14], were directly drawn from the conceptual framework. This helped build a comprehensive tapestry of the data. Going over the transcripts and listening to the audio files allowed for a richer analysis than just using transcripts as characteristics such as tone of voice, pauses and speech patterns were analysed. The audio data, as well as the photos taken during the dialogue, provided valuable clues with regards to a change of communication interaction and the development of new frames and discourses. By using data generated by the participants themselves, data generated by the researcher through observation and reflection, and by resonance testing this data through interviews with peer network participants, the data could also be triangulated for a more rigorous analysis (Neuman 2006, pp. 149-50).

During a last dialogue focus group in February 2013 (session 23) a preliminary analysis was presented to the dialogue participants. They were asked to analyse, reflect and comment on the summary of the answers given by the peer network participants. This aimed to correct any misconceptions or misunderstandings, and more importantly, included participants in the data analysis. During this focus group the researcher also used a number of strategies to access systemic knowledge and understanding in dialogue participants. These included a visual presentation of themes identified from peer network interviews and a slide show consisting of photos taken during the dialogue process. These were shown to participants combined with reproductions of the problem- and vision-maps created by them during the CDD inquiry. These techniques were used to stimulate the participants' memories and to assist them in reflecting on the dialogical journey that they had undertaken. Audio-recording during this focus group was not practical for a number of reasons: the researcher used a slide presentation to present data from the interviews and

[14] As explained in Chapter Three 'ephemeral emergents' refer to key words and ideas which occurred over a number of meetings of the dialogue group and therefore formed repeated patterns in the text data.

participants responded to the slides. He also showed participants photos of their joint dialogical inquiry to encourage them to reflect on their experience. Some of their comments were directed at the photos. Since audio-recording would not have captured these different sources of data, extensive research notes were taken as part of the researcher's journal. Burns recommends this method for dialogical inquiry groups in which researchers also play the role of facilitators (2007, p. 150).

The results of this group inquiry/analysis were fed back into the data analysis to further increase resonance testing and data triangulation. This increased the internal validity of the research analysis. The use of data from the dialogical inquiry group during the peer network interviews and the feeding back of data to the dialogue group also comprised what Burns calls 'ever-increasing circles of peer review' (2007, p. 169) which increase the participatory effect of the research and help to address some of the ethical issues discussed in the next section.

4.9 Ethical and practical considerations and limitations of the study

Researchers have a duty to protect the subjects of social research (Neuman 2006, p. 131). Even innocent questions can be potentially disturbing to informants and comprise an intervention in their social lives Blake 2000 p. 19. The guiding principles for ethical social research mention the principles of respect for persons, beneficience and justice, as embodied in informed consent (Neuman 2006, p. 135), assessment of benefits and risks, and just selection of subjects (Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 201). Action research not only reflects on but extends these ethical research principles (Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 199).

4.9.1 Use of written consent forms and research information

Since this was an action research process participants needed to understand the complementary nature of action planning and research reflection before they engaged in the dialogical inquiry group. They needed to be aware of the research aims, proposed research phases and the action research cycle. They also needed to know that they had the right to withdraw at any time before, during and after the process and that their personal data would be used with the greatest concern for privacy and confidentiality. The researcher addressed these issues through the participant information sheet and the individual and group discussion of the research as outlined above.

The research participants included Aboriginal people with past experiences of abuse and denial of their cultural heritage, and also members of migrant and refugee communities. Some of the participants had spent more than a decade in refugee camps in

Asia, others had travelled to Australia by boat with people smugglers and had spent time in immigration detention. There was a considerable amount of different kinds of trauma that members of the action inquiry group had suffered. In addition, other participants were unsure how long they would be allowed to stay in Australia on their current visas. English was a second language for most group members and one participant did not speak much English at all.

Neuman posits that socially disadvantaged participants from migrant and refugee backgrounds who may lack the necessary competency to anticipate negative repercussions of the research deserve special protection (Neuman 2006, p. 137). I addressed these issues through extensive explanations of the process prior to the start, and during each stage of the action inquiry dialogue. Even though the research and the information and consent forms were approved by the Behavioural & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee of The University of Queensland prior to the data collection, an ethical challenge occurred.

One research participant (D10) came to Australia as a Rohingyan refugee from Burma and had been invited by another participant from the Rohingya community in Brisbane (D4). This participant did not speak English at a level which would have enabled him to understand the information sheet and consent form. The researcher considered it unethical to ask him to sign the participant consent form, especially since D4 had explained that there was a history of land alienation and fraudulent signing of deeds to the disadvantage of Rohingya people in Burma. Translated by D4, he explained that Rohingyans were forced to sign documents they could not read which allowed the government and other ethnic groups to take over their land. Instead of asking D10 to read and sign the participant consent form, the researcher explained the research, data storage and use, and other related issues verbally to D10, and D4 translated it. D10 asked questions and then agreed verbally that he wanted to participate in the research. The transaction of this agreement was witnessed by other participants. D10 attended three sessions and was updated by D4 on the progress of the research. Contact was maintained through D4.

4.9.2 Time commitment of participants and drop out

Originally it was envisioned to finish the inquiry after eight sessions in June 2011. During the problem-mapping phase it became clear that participants enjoyed the sessions and did not want to rush the process. Because of the lower number of participants than

what had been anticipated originally, it was also possible to budget more sessions. The participants uniformly requested the inquiry sessions to be extended further and in total twenty-three dialogical inquiry and focus group sessions were conducted. Participants decided to continue meeting in 2012 as they found the action group inquiry so valuable and personally satisfying. Group members voiced that they had become friends and the researcher and participants gathered for a social event at the end of 2011. They also organised a meeting place and morning tea and snacks for these ongoing meetings. The ongoing meetings were not part of the data collection process for this research thesis, although they provided information with regards to the effects of the dialogue on communities at large. These meetings occurred throughout 2012. By submission of this thesis participants were still loosely in contact and met at intercultural community events.

Due to the time commitments placed on participants it was anticipated that some participants would withdraw from the research during the action inquiry phase. Complex adaptive systems undergo constant change, so this did not necessarily mean that the research data would be invalid. Attendance for each session and each participant was recorded (see Appendix One). Only three participants dropped out after one session. A number of participants still keep in touch with the researcher through infrequent telephone conversations or meetings. One participant (D13) could only attend one meeting and then moved interstate. During the implementation phase of the action plans she kept in touch via email updates and voiced how important the participation was for her. Interestingly, a number of her ideas found their way into the vision-map developed mostly by other participants who had never met her.

4.9.3 Participant distress

During the action inquiry participants shared very personal and sometimes upsetting stories. Examples included experiences as refugees in refugee camps, which went on for more than a decade, and being discriminated against because of their backgrounds as Aboriginal Australians or migrants from Africa. One participant was denied knowledge of her Aboriginal ancestors until she was in her forties, another participant was frustrated by not being able to find work matching her qualifications in Australia and by experiences of discrimination due to her African origin. Hearing these stories from each other caused some participants to cry and to have to take breaks during the dialogue. On other occasions participants displayed anger directed at treatment they had suffered in the past and this led to heated exchanges. They discussed different views of religion and governance and openly disagreed with each other on some occasions. Some participants

also were uncomfortable with the way others presented themselves and their views during the sessions. Susan Weil argues in response to issues of distress and emotional vulnerability of research participants (Burns 2007, p. 163):

> There are two particular issues that I think should concern us in the increasingly bureaucratic field of research ethics. Firstly, submission forms now routinely include questions that focus on the possibility of distress to research participants. This often leads researchers to respond by indicating that they will arrange for counselling or therapy for the 'distressed'. In this, we are seeing a shift towards constructing the researched as potential victims. Secondly, processes of significant learning challenge taken for granted assumptions. This can be simultaneously enabling and disabling to participants. There are periods when we yearn to go back to the comfort zone of our previous assumptions and ways of working, while at the same time, we need to overcome our anxiety about alternatives. What concerns me is that many taken for granted assumptions about ethics favours [sic] research that does little to challenge or disrupts [sic] the status quo.

Weil's argument that learning challenges assumptions fits very well into the experiences from this action inquiry. While participants found some of the sessions draining, upsetting and challenging, they all uniformly agreed that this provided them with unique opportunities for learning, personal growth and deep insights into each other's world views. Emotional outbreaks were addressed by providing space in the conversation for agitated and distressed participants to tell their stories uninterrupted. The researcher also reminded participants if they disagreed to seek clarification and to speak from their own perspective instead of generalising arguments to win a debate. In some instances the only viable response was a minute of silence for everyone to work through stories of human misery and desperation. These interventions were an important part of dialogue facilitation. As will be described in the findings chapters, the occasions of emotional vulnerability created a strong bond between participants. Over the course of the twenty-three meetings they started embracing each other at the start and finish of a session. They began calling each other 'friends' and stated that the inquiry group had turned into an important social occasion and was far more than a meeting to progress social change or conduct research.

4.9.4 Quality and trustworthiness

Because of the qualitative action research methodology and the purposive sampling process focused on participants in the dialogue process, generalisations of the findings are difficult (Gustavsen, Hansson & Qvale 2008, p. 63). Complex adaptive systems theory emphasises the uniqueness of each complex system in its particular context and boundaries (Burns 2007, p. 28). Therefore a similar research process with a different community group could have provided very different outcomes. However, patterns of social

emergence and downward causation are common to all complex social systems. The focus of the study adds to the understanding of these processes. While some question the quality of action research, Grant et al. (2008, p. 598) maintain that credible accounts in community action research are those that adequately capture the experiences of participants. The criteria for this credibility must be decided collaboratively by researchers and community participants. Wherever possible in this research study, information was fed back to the action inquiry group and participants were asked for feedback. Much of the data was generated by the participants themselves and was even entered into the ISM software by them.

When dialogue participants report on changes in interaction during the dialogue and in the larger community, their reports can be biased simply by participating in the workshop and therefore threaten the validity of the study (Doob & Foltz 1974, p. 247). Leonard Doob and William Foltz found that workshops which aim to help communities deal with strong conflict in their midst often have a lasting impact on participants. However, they also found that many observations from workshop participants could be reconfirmed either with gatekeepers or by asking other participants. In this study the resonance testing through interviews with peer network participants allowed for this cross-checking and therefore increased internal validity. In addition, the participant researchers were given an opportunity to review and comment on the data collection and therefore were able to participate in the data analysis.

4.9.5 Involvement of the researcher as facilitator, participant and interpreter of data

The researcher in this study acted as facilitator of the dialogue process and analyst of the data gathered. As such he inadvertently brought personal bias into the study. Just as discourse analysts are tied to the discourse group they are investigating, either as members of the same social group or as observers of it (Bloor, Meriel & Bloor 2007, p. 4), the researcher was tied to the dialogical inquiry group and his own experiences as a migrant, conflict resolution practitioner and community development researcher. The researcher also made value decisions about the boundaries of the inquiry system and the methodology for facilitation, data collection and analysis.

***Excursus*: involvement of the researcher and voice in this thesis**

Throughout the writing of this thesis the researcher has struggled with the way in which to record his own voice and to acknowledge his deep involvement in the dialogue and research process. He has decided that his involvement and participation need to be acknowledged directly through the writing style of this thesis. So far the researcher has presented himself in the third person, as is common in the sociological research literature. This presentation positions him semantically as a neutral and distanced observer of social phenomena. However, this thesis has argued that this is epistemologically not acceptable under a systems ontology. While it was appropriate in the previous chapters which dealt mainly with an interpretation of incidents reported in Australia and with scholarly literature, the following chapters will present the interpretations and conclusions the researcher has drawn from the data. They will also draw on his own reflective observations in the form of the researcher journal. Therefore, from here on the thesis changes its style and acknowledges the researcher as a co-creator of knowledge and a participant in the research process through the use of the first person singular 'I, me, my and mine'.

My scholarly work and my practice work in dialogue and mediation influenced me towards the use of such practices and to potentially disregard other ways of engagement. Furthermore, my research work on complex systems may have tempted me to see patterns of interaction where others might not see them. One could argue that these conscious and subconscious biases may have influenced my conduct during the facilitation. The problem-map and the vision-map developed by participants both point to a need for dialogue and cross-cultural interpersonal engagement as the most important elements of building an inclusive and cohesive society. I have noticed this pattern before when using CDD with other participants in community settings.[15] Does it point to a universal need for interpersonal engagement, sharing of story and acknowledgment of painful and joyful experiences? Or does it point to a facilitation method and facilitator which in the end only try to validate their own existence? This question will be further discussed in the following chapters which concentrate on the research findings. While personal bias can never be fully excised from an interpretative systemic research design, it can be acknowledged and put in context with the views of the research participants. I have attempted to manage this bias through my action research methodology by discussing the research data with the participants as participant researchers. In addition to this, Brydon-

[15] Over the past eight years the researcher has facilitated CDD workshops and training sessions with a variety of community organisations and service providers. On many occasions a lack of communication or dialogue was discovered to be the central problem of the particular group using the CDD method.

Miller suggests a critical examination of the self of the researcher by keeping a reflective research journal (Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 205). In my researcher notes I recorded not just observations of participants but also included personal observations, self-reflection and information on my own thoughts and views. The following examples illustrates this:

> I was again very pleased with the session. I was pleased that after the break 4 people turned up and that in particular D9, who had only attended once before, turned up. She professed in the focus group that the dialogue gave her strength to move from feeling like a victim to a much more positive orientation. And she looked the part. I broke neutrality again in talking about the gambling benefits fund project.[16] I did this because of the connections D7 has with Kevin Rudd and also because I wanted to involve the group in a possible larger project. This means that the idea did not come from them and was not generated by the group members as part of the dialogue. But it aligned [sic] well with things they had raised and discussed. It also remains to be seen whether they will involve themselves in the project. I have started to see myself much more as a group members than a facilitator. These people have become my friends and I am glad that the PhD research has allowed the come [sic] together, share food and to learn from each other. I am conscious that readers will critique the validity of my data since I am not an [sic] neutral observer, but I feel that the connections I have built with the group are also expressions of the systemic nature of our being together as part of the greater Brisbane community. And they seem to see it that way, too.(Excerpt from researcher journal, session 9, 16 July 2011)

> […] I was challenged in the discussion about religion. I was slightly afraid that D4 would ask me if I believe in god and that I would have to say I don't. It did not come to this direct question. I don't see it as my role to challenge his beliefs, and I made clear that I was more interested in understanding them better. I still react to someone talking about religious beliefs that I find questionable. I particularly react to statements like "the Quran has never been changed. It holds everything in it". I don't think that the book survived completely unchanged throughout the ages. I also think that some of the prescriptions were made for different social and natural circumstances are not necessarily accurate or needed anymore. But I don't know much about Islam and these statements are preconceptions based on partial information. Sometimes it is hard for me to follow D4 because of language difficulties and his sometimes hard to understand ideas. But I really value his contributions and I am impressed that we discussed such a sensible topic. (Excerpt from researcher journal, session 5, 21 May 2011)

Through these steps I intended to maintain a strong reflexivity within my researcher role. Throughout the data collection and analysis I have tried to critically question my own position with regards to the discourse (Bloor, Meriel & Bloor 2007, p. 4).

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the systemic action research approach that was employed for this research study. It has embedded it in a critical interpretivist epistemology which acknowledges that system boundaries are deliberately constructed to allow investigation and analysis and that there is no objective social reality. Systemic action research is

[16] This project refers to the continuation of the Community Café Dialogues large-group dialogue program in 2012. Some members of the dialogical inquiry group became members of a community reference group for this project and they actively assisted and promoted the Community Café Dialogues. This helped significantly increase participant numbers from the first project in 2010 that was mentioned as part of the recruitment process.

different from other forms of action research in that it draws on ever-increasing circles of peer review and tests the resonance of insights generated with a local dialogical inquiry group in other parts of the system. It has been explained how the local dialogical inquiry group was convened and how the sessions were facilitated and recorded. The dialogical action inquiry was complemented by reflective conversations in audio-recorded focus groups. The resonance testing and data triangulation were achieved through peer network interviews with participants who were knowledgeable about intercultural community relations in the Brisbane area and who were also referred by dialogue participants. Further data was gathered through participant observation, literature review and collection of newspaper sources. This data was stored, coded and analysed by the researcher and fed back to the inquiry group for a collaborative data analysis to elicit their reflections of changes related to the dialogue process. The action inquiry posed a number of challenges, such as language barriers, participant distress and time commitment which were dealt with. Finally, the chapter considered a number of potential challenges and critiques with regards to the quality of the research process and the trustworthiness of the data collected. Scholarly views and practical strategies were described to illustrate why the data collected and the approach to analysis can deliver high-quality research data. The outcomes of the analysis are described in the following chapters.

5. Research findings 1: the emergence of new ideas and relationships within a small-group intercultural dialogical research inquiry

The findings of this research study are presented in two chapters. The current chapter deals with changes within the dialogical inquiry group and with the ideas and social structure developed within this micro-system. The following chapter focuses on the outward emergence of ideas and frames of interaction from the dialogical inquiry group and the relationship between dialogue and peer network.

The findings in the current chapter respond to research question one which investigates the experiences of research participants with regards to the emergence of new ideas and frames of interaction in their dialogue process. The research findings are based on an analysis of the textual data collected during the dialogical inquiry sessions, research journal notes and the audio-recordings of four focus groups and one interview with the dialogue participants. Some data from interviews with peer network participants was used to highlight the connections between the micro-system of the dialogue group and the meso-systems of the participants outside the dialogue which will be discussed in more detail in the second findings chapter. Naturally, the data presented is only a sub-section of the total data that was collected. It was coded and analysed according to themes which responded to the research questions and the conceptual framework of the thesis.

Conceptually this chapter presents the ‘process of upward emergence from individual idea to collective stable emergent’ and to ‘social structure in the action plan.’ This chapter will first discuss the inseparability of dialogue process and dialogue content in this action research inquiry and provide the reader with an overview of the insights that the inquiry group participants generated with regards to the state of lived multicultural experience in the greater Brisbane area. The collective analysis undertaken by the inquiry group highlights the lack of opportunity for connection between people from different cultural backgrounds as part of their everyday lives and examines how this can be addressed through more dialogical encounters across difference.

In the second part of the chapter the personal and collective experiences of dialogue participants are reported and their accounts of individual and collective transformation are discussed. This provided insights into dialogue theory and practice and the importance of storytelling to harness dialogic moments. It also adds to the academic discussion about

the differences between dialogue and deliberation and shows that a deliberative process like the Creative Dialogue & Design process can provide the framework for authentic dialogue between participants and produce practical results at the same time.

5.1 Inseparability of dialogical inquiry process and content

Systemic thinking posits that the idea of an independent observer is not congruent with social reality. Processes of collective interaction and intervention always impact on the content of this interaction and vice versa (Midgley 2000, pp. 4-5). This connection between process and content could be observed in the relationship between the research questions examined in this thesis and the questions which the dialogical group selected for their inquiry. Research question one focused on the process of dialogical inquiry and the participants' experiences of the emergence of new ideas and changes in relationship. The questions that the inquiry group discussed during the CDD process dealt with barriers between communities and ways to overcome these barriers, which also included the change of relationships through dialogical interaction.

Asking about significant barriers which hinder relationship-building between communities is also a question about barriers to inter-group dialogue and constructive interaction. Dialogue was defined in Chapter Two as a process of 'reciprocal translation which eventually forges a common meaning and establishes the basis for a new community, which is not equal of the world of either participant in the dialogue but a transformation of the fundamental relationship of the participants' (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2005, p. 294). The research participants identified as their primary goal to address the barriers to the collaborative idea of 'providing people with due respect and a lived experience of this respect'. They clarified the meaning of this idea using the following statement:

> The word nurture should always be there. I have seen it in schools that teachers put children down. Instead of nurturing they put the children down. You don't put any person down in front of anyone else. Teachers should talk with the class like we are talking in this dialogue. [...] Another way is to give people the opportunity to tell their ideas and to listen to them. This is another example of lived respect. Listening is very important. Listen with an open heart and mind. Sitting together as friends. (CDD Vision-mapping document, 15 October 2011).

In this statement participants referred to their own experience during the dialogical research inquiry as a way of clarifying and defining what a lived experience of respect is. The experiences during the inquiry process became intertwined with the goal of the inquiry. This connection was evident in the way in which participants considered the focus group recordings not as a separate part of the data collection but as an integral part of the

dialogical inquiry process. Because of this connection between process and content, the data analysis of this chapter combines the data created by the inquiry participants using the ISM software with the audio-data collected during the focus groups and interviews. Data gathered in the peer network interviews was then used to triangulate the themes emerging from the dialogical inquiry.

5.2 Insights from the dialogical inquiry: barriers which hinder better intercommunal relationships and goals to overcome these barriers

By using the CDD method described in section 4.5 of Chapter Four of this thesis the inquiry group members created two maps, or *problematiques,* to visualise the outcomes of their dialogical inquiry into barriers between communities and goals to overcome these barriers.[17] The group created two text documents which listed all ideas generated and clarifications of these ideas as stated by the dialogue group members.[18]

5.2.1 Barriers between communities

After eight sessions the dialogical inquiry produced the following map of barriers which hinder communities from building better relationships with each other. The map is the output from the structuring process described in section 4.5.1 of the methodology chapter and is presented in figure 5.1 below:

[17] Hereafter named CDD Problem-map and CDD Vision-map.

[18] Within the word limit of this thesis it was not possible to include both clarification documents in the appendices. Excerpts from these documents are presented in this section. The CDD inquiry group developed a report with the maps and the findings from the inquiry. This report is available online on the researcher's personal website at http://www.creativedialogue.com.au/resources--publications.html.

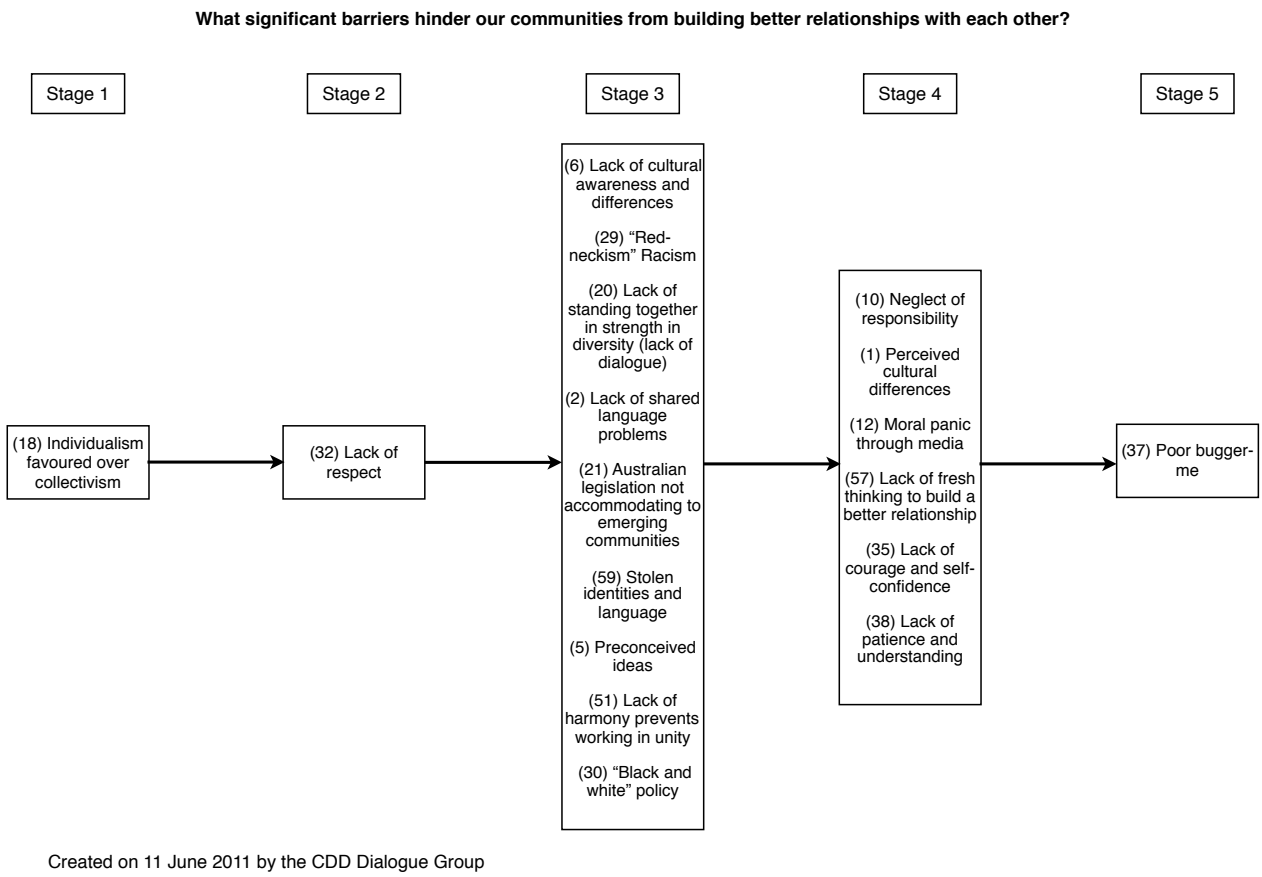

Figure 5.1 CDD Problem-map

The inquiry group identified as the root barrier in stage one a preference for individualist world views over collectivist world views in mainstream Australian society. They defined this idea in the following clarification statement:

> In the West people have existed in the primacy of the individual. In other places people have existed in the primacy of the collective. It is a trend in development and modernisation to move from the collective to the individual. When communities come to Australia (white Australia is individualist) they are collectivist peoples, but here they turn towards the individualism. Modernisation is seen as a move from the collective to the individual. Communities are now forced to live by "one man one vote" and Western ideas of human rights and individualism. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011)

While this statement identifies the experiences of migrants from collectivist cultural backgrounds the group characterised this as a problem that also applies to Aboriginal Australians. Moreover, they emphasised the importance of social bonds between people which is expressed in the second root barrier, a 'lack of respect'. The clarification of this element referred to the social bonds with Elders and that 'leadership from parents must come shining through the children.' Finally the group pointed out the reciprocity of

respectful interaction, in that 'you have to give respect to receive respect'. The preference of individualism and the lack of respect are root problems and are causal for a group of central barriers named in stage three of the map.

According to the discussions of the inquiry group and the interpretation through the ISM software, these barriers form a central cluster of interrelated sub-problems. Addressing one alone is less effective because the barriers are linked with each other. IM/ CDD practice suggests that elements in the primary stages of the *problematique* are root causes and can be difficult to address due to the systemic and structural nature of the problem or conflict. Problems in the central stages of the diagram are easier to address and work on (Broome & Fulbright 1995, p. 31). The central barriers identified reflect problems often encountered in contemporary Australian society: a white ethno-centric world view which is ignorant of cultural difference (LeBaron 2003, p. 23); a lack of ability to communicate respectfully (whether due to actual language barriers or to lack of cultural fluency); a legislative framework which often does not capture the life experiences of minorities (Hollinsworth 2006, pp. 47-50) and which can be traced back to the White Australia Policy, which dominated the country for more than seventy years (Chiro 2011, p. 19). Participants thought that communities and individuals were still grappling with the legacy of the past, in particular Aboriginal people suffering from the forced removal of children as part of the Stolen Generations.[19] This legacy can make it difficult for people to reach out and to connect with others, as expressed in the following statement:

> Aboriginal people who are stolen generation find it really hard to identify who they are themselves and to get acceptance within their own communities. It is even harder for them to connect with other communities. This problem could also affect other people, for example from Africa, who were taken from their land or removed from their families through war. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011)

What the inquiry group members described can be understood as the effects of downward causation (Sawyer 2005, pp. 210-25) caused by the social structure of historical discourse about the relationship between white settler Australians, First Nations Australians and migrants. When viewed through the lens of the Attractor Landscape Model, discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, what the inquiry group members pointed out could be interpreted as a system attractor in Australian society pulling the system towards the perception of supremacy of white settler culture. This creates and reinforces

[19] From the early 1900s well into 1970 Australian state governments removed First Nations children from their families and placed them in foster care as part of the assimilation policies prevalent in the country (Hollinsworth 2006, p. 109). Removal from their primary carers had devastating effects on the health and development of Indigenous children, their families and communities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). Whole generations of First Nations people do not know who their families are or to which kinship group they belong. They are called the 'Stolen Generations.'

the barriers to engagement with First Nations Australia and with people who are different from the white settler ideal. With regards to the Aboriginal people referred to in the statement above, this downward causation can be so strong that it inhibits people from participating in cross-cultural activities. They effectively cannot envision a dialogue among equals borne out of the colonial discourse still strong in Australian society. A recent example of the strength of this discourse was the referral to Sydney being ‘nothing but bush’ before the arrival of the First Fleet, by the current Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott (Henderson 2014).

Even if people want to connect better, perceived differences can make it difficult to do so and create fear and embarrassment which hinders first contact. Communities are often more focused on what divides them without seeing what similarities they share. Amartya Sen (2006, p. 2) suggests that in-group solidarity can feed out-group discord and lead people to categorise members of their out-groups according to simplified stereotypes which aim to provide a total description of their identities. This behaviour, Sen argues, can often lead to violent conflict.

Stages three and four of the problem-map describe the effects of the central problems. These effects include a neglect of responsibility on behalf of community leaders; perceived cultural differences which exacerbate conflict; negative stories in the media; a lack of energy and commitment to improve relationships; and a lack of empathy and confidence to engage people from other community groups. Ultimately marginalised people take up what one participant called a ‘poor bugger-me’ attitude which was linked to the resigned response of Aboriginal people to their colonisers and is expressed in stage five of the problem-map:

> People called Aboriginals poor buggers and then the Aboriginal people responded by saying "poor bugger me". It's a syndrome. You are carrying a grudge. You cower down to people. We should be standing and putting our head high. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2012)

What the group has created in the problem-map is their view of root causes and effects with regards to a lack of intercultural connections. Their analysis correlates with the system attractors identified in the literature review and conceptual framework of this thesis. The analysis adds another dimension. The inquiry group did not place as the root cause a fear of otherness or a paranoid nationalism, they talk about even more abstract categories such as a preference of individualism over collectivism and a domination of a Western or Eurocentric understanding of community. In my view, this domination of individualist views is what encourages and nurtures a fear of difference since it encourages an ethnocentric

view of the world based on the experiences of lonely white British settlers in what they perceived a hostile environment. As part of colonisation these settlers tamed this environment and the people living there by thoroughly establishing a discourse of how people should live together based on their ethnocentric world view. The result of the inquiry implies the importance of historical narratives which can shape current experiences.

5.2.2 Goals to encourage a well-connected inclusive society

During the continuation of the dialogue the inquiry group then used the CDD process again to develop another *problematique*, this one depicting goals that they wanted to work towards to alleviate the problems identified. This *problematique* is presented below in figure 5.2:

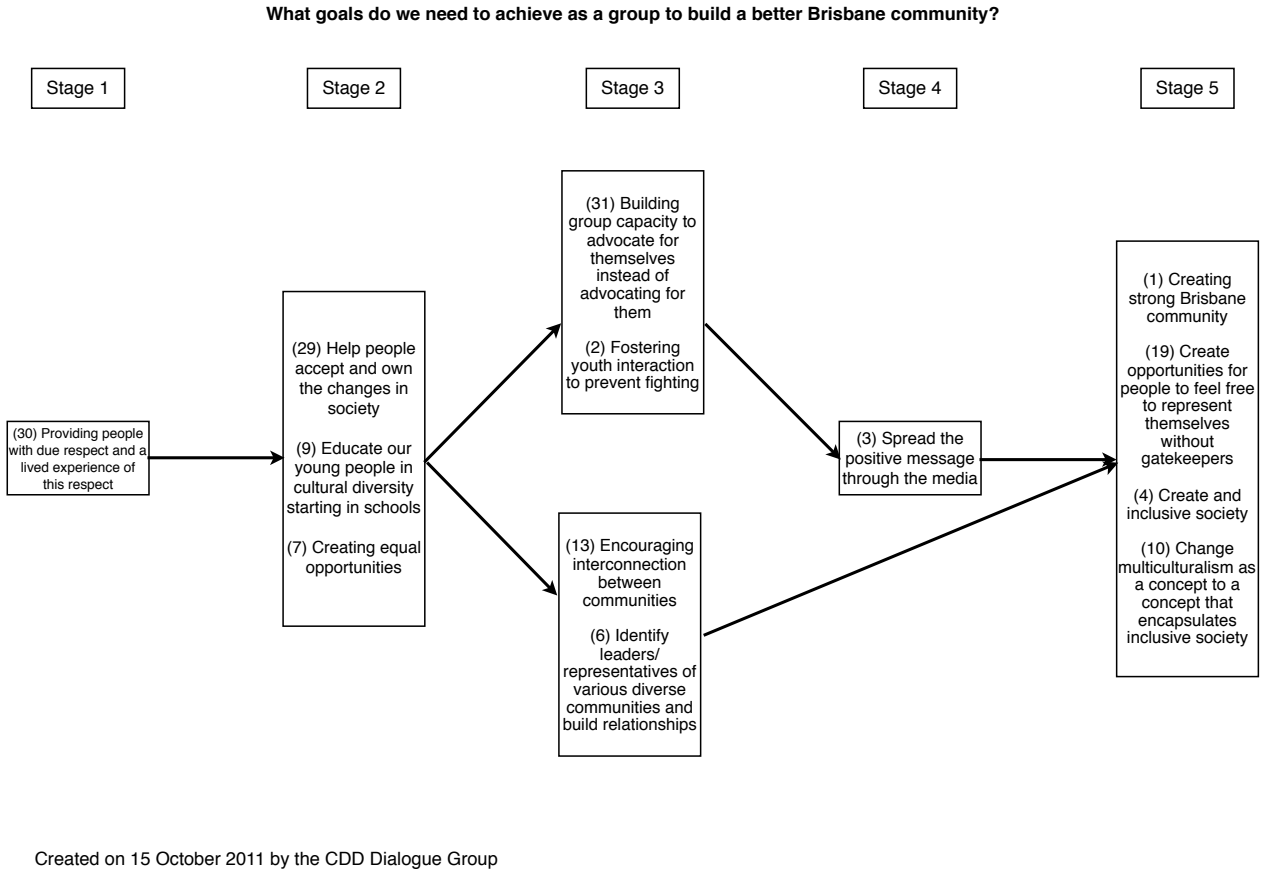

Figure 5.2 CDD Vision-map

According to the views of the inquiry group the central goal to build better connections is ‘providing people with a lived experience of respect’. This goal was already

mentioned and clarified in the introduction to this section. Achieving this goal would also positively influence the three other primary goals depicted in stage two of the map.

Following on from these primary goals, the group differentiated between two separate goal-complexes which can be engaged independently. This is depicted in the map through the two separate pathways from stage two to stage three. These two goal complexes are:

1. Building the capacity of groups and communities to advocate for themselves instead of using gatekeepers, and related to this, the fostering of constructive interaction among young people to prevent fighting.

2. Encouraging more interconnections between different cultural communities, and related to this, identifying leaders/representatives of various diverse communities to build better relationships.

The accomplishment of these goals could, according to the consensus of the group, lead to positive messages in the media about minority communities (stage four). Further positive effects could include a strong and more unified Brisbane community, more freedom for groups not to depend on gatekeepers as advocates; and ultimately a more inclusive and cohesive society with a new concept of multiculturalism which nurtures these connections between different groups (stage five).

Significant about these goals is the centrality of interconnection, communication and dialogue based on the idea of a lived experience of respect. Compared to the definitions and concepts of dialogue discussed in the literature review, this points to a recognition of the importance of dialogical experience as a fundamental element of well-connected, inclusive and peaceful communities. Banathy and Jenlink's (2005, p. 4) definition of dialogue, discussed in section 2.4.1 of the literature review included aspects of mutuality, community and authenticity. I interpret this as a call for a dialogical encounter at the heart of intercommunal relationships and therefore the need for more processes, opportunities and events which can encourage such encounters.

According to the results of the dialogical enquiry engaging as many community members as possible in dialogical exchanges helps building a better connected community. Dialogue can alleviate conflict-exacerbating downward causation in a complex social system, however this effect is only possible if social actors participate in a dialogical environment where they can experience this respect. What the group created with the help of my facilitation was such an environment. This has helped to produce changes and

positive effects among the inquiry group members. These will be discussed in the next section.

5.3 Group dynamics: experiences of individual and collective transformations

During the CDD inquiry process the research participants remarked on powerful transformations which they experienced individually and as a group. This section presents some of these changes and triangulates the experiences expressed by participants, where possible, with data gathered in the peer network interviews.

5.3.1 Initial fear becomes an expression of friendship

For the inquiry participants, an important part of the dialogical encounter was the exchange of personal stories, information about their backgrounds and life experiences. These were considered more important than actual discussion of problems or goals. Participants highlighted the importance of sharing experiences and how this helped to build respect and appreciation for each other. After only two sessions, participant D7 already remarked to D4 (whom she had only met for the second time in her life) that:

> […] we have broken down fences in just two sessions. (Researcher journal, session 2, 16 April 2011).

During an interview at the beginning of this session the same participant explained:

> Sharing and caring and listening to everybody. Listening to what everybody had to say, what their points of view were. How interesting that we all had an input in various different ways for finding out who was who and who does what. […] (Interview with D7, 16 April 2011).

The experience of breaking down barriers between participants was another factor which connected inquiry process and inquiry content. During the CDD process the group developed the following statement about how important it was to share personal stories and experiences for dealing with a fear of otherness:

> This dialogue is such an opportunity that really helps in talking about this fear. It is important for learning to live like human beings together that we share experiences and that people also listen to terrible experiences. When we share we can also listen and learn from others. Every human being has a responsibility for every other human being. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

The fear mentioned in this statement was discussed throughout the whole dialogical inquiry. Participants talked about the fear of the unknown, fear of embarrassing oneself in cross-cultural encounters and fear derived from negative stereotypes and previous conflictual encounters. D12 reflected that talking with D6 (who worked for Queensland Police Service) was a real eye-opener because he had never sat down and talked with a

police officer. He feared the police in his home country of Afghanistan and said he was uneasy when he learned that D6 was a police officer. This fear completely dissipated during participation in the inquiry group and he reflected that he learned that police in Queensland are very different and much less fear-inducing than in Afghanistan (D12, focus group 3, 22 October 2011). D6 professed that before engaging with D12 during the inquiry process she had had concerns about people from Afghanistan and their connections to terrorism. The dialogical inquiry helped her change these perceptions. The exchanges of experience and stories during the inquiry process assisted the participants to deal with these fears. When these opportunities do not exist or are not created, then the fear of otherness creates a barrier and this can lead to disrespectful behaviour, as expressed in the following statement:

> For us personally there was a lack of relationship before we started this dialogue. We now have more respect for other people's cultures. We have built relationships. We built bridges. We have multiplied. We should spread the message further. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

Building meaningful relationships not only decreases fear of otherness, it creates feelings of curiosity and interest. An example for this was again the interaction between D6 and D12. D6 remarked that she had become interested in Afghani culture by talking to D12 and that she wanted to learn more about D12 and his community. Their positive experience with each other led to what systems scientists would call a positive feedback loop which increased each participant's comfort with the other and helped them develop a strong personal bond.

Opportunities for dialogical engagement do not necessarily occur by themselves. D11 explained how he had lived in Australia as a refugee without engaging much with the history of First Nations peoples:

> This has been a bit of a challenge for me. To know the history of Aboriginal people here in Australia. Living in that society. It was a challenge for me. Because the information you get is from different sources. This dialogue made me to meet with those people themselves. The Aboriginal people. Talk to them and listen to their stories, their real history and culture. It opened for me to know this new culture and to live within that culture. That's what I saw. It really personally affected me too much. The other side, the way I communicated this to my community. The way I do that communication and I take care of or how I respect the culture of this land, that's what I got from the dialogue. […] (D11, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

D11 talked about meeting Aboriginal people during the dialogue and listening to their stories. He considered this differently from getting information from other sources, such as mainstream media or scholarly literature. Having a chance to sit face-to-face with First Nations Australians and to hear their stories and world views was an important experience

which impacted on the way that D11 communicated this relationship to members of his own community. According to D11's statement, the dialogical inquiry 'made me to meet with those people themselves'. In my view, D11 is also referring to the careful framing of conversation and the process of dialogue itself, which took place during the inquiry. Dialogue is not everyday conversation, it creates a certain authenticity and immediacy which helps participants to listen deeply. In his instance this provided a unique opportunity to learn from and to better understand First Nations Australians.

In summary, the participants of the dialogical inquiry process developed significant interpersonal bonds and communicated these outwards to others who did not participate. D7 summarised the positive effects of the dialogue on the relationships of the participants:

> It shows just how far we - well, I, I talk on my behalf, how far I have grown to understand D6's nationality, D12's, mine, yours. Look how we are all embracing. When we meet here we all embrace each other. And that has become very strong. We don't just do it here, we do it in front of everybody. (D7, focus group 3, 22 October 2011).

The last point made refers to the outward emergence of this relationship change from the dialogue group to other meso- and exo-systems. They expressed their improved relationships not just when meeting during inquiry sessions, they actually presented this change as a positive signal to others when they met outside the inquiry group during community events. This behaviour provided a link between the micro-system of the dialogue group the meso- and exo-systems of peer networks and communities described in the conceptual framework of this thesis. What is interesting about this link is that it was not necessarily intentionally and consciously established. The group did not talk about a particular project or idea which involved role-modeling of their intercultural relationships to others. In spite of this lack of intention, I was able to observe that they communicated their constructive interaction to others outside the dialogue by physical contact such as hugging, kissing and handshakes. When speaking during community events they often paused in their contributions to discussion and invited each other into conversations, acknowledging that they respected and encouraged each other.

5.3.2 Development of new constructive frames of interaction

Inquiry group members pointed out that the participation in the dialogical inquiry changed their interaction with others. Changes included an increased awareness of their own cultural backgrounds, values and behaviours as well as an increase in self-confidence and empathy. D7 reflected on the insight that she had become more aware of her own communication patterns:

> Just learning that made me very aware of my talking without thinking. When you are doing a dialogue with this, with some different parts of the world, we have got to respect that we say the right things. And that's a learning. That's a learning process that we are not aware of, but we are willing to learn. Well, I am willing to learn and change my points of view. (Interview with D7, 16 April 2011).

The increased cultural awareness that participants derived from the dialogical inquiry allowed them to be more self-confident and improved their relations with other people whom they might have been afraid of before participating in the dialogue. D9 provided a powerful example of how her self-confidence increased and how she changed her communication with people from First Nations backgrounds in everyday encounters:

> […] I was very scared to pass by Aboriginal people on the street because my daughter said, mum this is very dangerous. You like to speak with everyone. Here is not your country. These people will stop you. Stop speaking. My daughter said it is dangerous, even your colour is dangerous. When I asked why my colour was a problem, she said that sometimes [the people on the street] say: "Cousin, give me five dollars." Don't stop because they can be aggressive. But I am not scared anymore. I just say: "Brother or cousin, I don't have anything. I am poor." I laugh and I go. But some people say the drunk Aboriginal people can be aggressive. But you are not rude to them, they are aggressive because they need to defend themselves. They are homeless, they have problems. If you are bad to them then they will be bad to you. And now I just tell them I don't have money and we laugh. Before I was so scared of what they were going to do. But now I am not scared anymore. When I go on the train with my friend [name removed] I was scared to pass by Central Station. But now I am not scared anymore. (D9, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

D9's experience provides another example of the downward causation caused by social structure. Her interaction with her daughter and her exposure to discriminating and negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people made her fearful and impacted on her own behaviour towards them; the downward causation identified by Sawyer (Sawyer 2005, pp. 216-7). The participation in the dialogue provided her with positive and constructive interactions with Aboriginal people and this changed her views on them, an example of social emergence and the creation of new social structure through the dialogue. This structure changed her own views and behaviour and she interacted differently with Aboriginal people outside the dialogue group.

The increase in confidence and desire to relate to others across cultural difference was also directly confirmed by D7:

> It makes you more confident to go out in the community and be more accepted. And I think that acceptance I have learned here. That respect. And when we talk about respect in our community it is quite strong. I want to go out anywhere and talk to anybody now no matter if I am on a bus, a train, talking to young people. I have all the confidence in the world to say I am an Aboriginal woman. I want to learn about your culture. (D7, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

In addition to this participants in the inquiry commented on their own personal interactions during the dialogue process. They emphasised the importance of listening

actively and of giving others the opportunity to tell their own stories. The group recognised the importance of respecting different views and of disagreeing respectfully, as exemplified by the following brief exchange:

> During the vision-mapping stage D5 said to D7: “Aunty, in my culture we respect elders, but I respectfully disagree with you.” D7 answered: “You have a voice. That’s fine.” (Researcher journal, CDD session 16, 15 October 2011).

The constructive interaction that participants created and experienced during the dialogical inquiry process was, in their view, markedly different from the interaction experienced in other community meetings. D7 talked about her recollections of heated exchanges at important community gatherings and stated that her experience during the dialogical inquiry was quite different in nature:

> I think it is the input that everyone had. It [the dialogical inquiry process] is an open forum and you can say things without offending another person. I found it to become more relaxing with each other, sitting around a table. Maybe we say we’d like more people to come but more can be sometimes a little bit disruptive. With less you can work as a working party. And get things to go forward. That is what I found in a lot of Aboriginal community. Sometimes when you have to make a decision, like in parliament, where you have a lot of people whom you have to make decisions for. One set of rules. But here we all have an input […]. (D7, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

The CDD process encouraged input by all participants, as mentioned in the statement from D7. Nominal Group Technique (NGT), which was used in the first stage of a CDD inquiry, established a conversation circle in which each participant contributed one idea in a round-robin style. This meant that input was relatively brief and people had the opportunity to contribute often (Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 205). This structure encouraged listening to others and taking in their ideas instead of trying to find the weak points in each other’s views. The fairly small group size also contributed to this more relaxed atmosphere. D8, who only participated in two meetings, told me that she did not often talk at community meetings but that she could have her voice heard in the dialogical inquiry sessions that she attended (Researcher journal, session 2, 16 April 2011). In my interpretation, the research participants experienced a different quality of interaction in the dialogue, which they may not have experienced in other contexts. This was supported by the use of the ISM software and the data projection. The visualisation of idea statements through the projection of the screen image on the wall and the posting of statements on paper on the wall was perceived to give a visual summary of progress and encouraged participants to write ideas down and to think about them. D5 explained how this contributed to his active participation in the process:

> It is a good process. It kept me engaged a lot. I could see how things were going. I could move back and forth. I felt more in charge of the process and that is why I must

> learn it now. I think it is a workable tool. Really user-friendly. The way that it gives you the power to control things as you move along. You don't lose things easily. You can go back. That flexibility is very very good. (D5, focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

This method responds directly to the needs of visual learners who need information on wall charts or paper posted on the walls of a facilitation space. It is useful to bring attention back to the topic under discussion (Lakey 2010) and to elicit deeper reflection and analysis of statements by participants. In that way the CDD process helped the participants to analyse the topics under discussion.

This section has provided examples of how participants became more aware of their own ways of communicating and more attuned to communicating across difference. They commented on increased self-confidence and empathy, as well as how the process encouraged them to participate actively and how it allowed them to have equal input into the dialogue. The interaction during the dialogical inquiry was perceived differently from other experiences in community settings where this form of appreciative equal conversation was seen to be lacking.

5.3.3 Improved analytical and systemic thinking and expression

According to the views of research participants, they did not just become actively engaged in the dialogical inquiry. The structure of the CDD process helped them to better understand community problems and to develop ideas for more effective solutions. Participants described how the staged systematic process of the CDD inquiry assisted them in getting a more comprehensive and analytic understanding of the issues discussed. D3 made the following comment:

> You were doing a wall-building or foundation-building to further the dialogue. (D3, focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

The metaphor of wall-building speaks to the value of the linear and systematic practice of the CDD method. Participants first brainstormed and collected ideas, then they clarified the meaning of these ideas and then they discussed how these ideas related and influenced each other. This structure helped the inquiry group to gain a nuanced, and systematic understanding of the problems and goals they were talking about. D12 explained how this structure was like a journey towards the goal:

> The problem and goal. How to achieve on that goal. I did not think proper about that, what he is doing, what I am doing, what we should do. But then in here we sit together and have discussions with each other and we think about many different points. That gave it to me a positive feedback for future to do today. (D12, focus group 3, 22 October 2011)

This reflection gave rise to another comparison with experiences outside the dialogical inquiry. D12 went on to reflect on the shortcomings of other discussion and deliberation processes in his community:

> Now when I am going inside my community and we have a meeting I will tell them we should do this, this, and this in a proper way. Before when we had a meeting [...] we start from the first step and then went straight to the end. We did not follow the road you know. (D12, focus group 3, 22 October 2011)

D12 talked about the 'road' to follow from initial idea to action plan and the problem if a group or community tries to take shortcuts and jump straight to the actions without a thorough understanding of problems and goals. Through the CDD process participants went from a general idea to a clear picture, as was remarked by D6 in one of the reflection focus groups:

> We were looking at the issues. We were able to identify what those issues are and how we are able to put them in practical projects and how we are going to achieve them. (D6, focus group 3, 22 October 2011).

The previous sections described the participants' experiences of an improvement in their abilities for systematic thinking and efficient planning. Without any prompting for this specific reflection, these experiences were confirmed by some of the peer network participants who commented on positive changes in inquiry group members that they had perceived. Peer network participants, who were also community development professionals, mentioned that meetings with diverse communities were often chaotic and unorganised. They commented on a marked change in the inquiry participants and attributed this, in their view, to the inquiry process. P3 made the following statement in his interview:

> Those who went through this dialogue. I think some of the benefit they got from this is how to speak about the issue, how to articulate the issue and remain respectful to others. [...] The work you did with them had serious positive impact for them. They could identify the issue, and not just identify, for the first time they could name the issue. Articulating the issue is one of the major barriers. If you are not able to articulate it then nobody will be able to address it. Through the dialogue they were actually able to articulate some of the issues. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

One of the outcomes of the dialogical inquiry was a report which presented the two *problematiques* created by the group and included the clarifications which were typed into the ISM software. The group asked me to edit this report to ensure anonymity and to share it with state government and settlement service providers. Group members themselves shared printed copies of the report with other community members at meetings organised by their own communities or by service providers. P1, a community development worker referred by D5, commented on his view of the report:

> Until I read the report I did not have an idea how the group was providing a map for how a whole lot of groups, anybody who is willing to listen and pick up the agenda make some progress in these things. I think what I have learned through my connection with D5 and through reading the report is how incredibly powerful it is to actually have basically ordinary people working together and working things through in a careful and systematic and ongoing way. […] (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

In P1's view, the inquiry produced results which provided a thorough analysis of problems and strategies connected to social cohesion and connectedness of people. P1 went further and elaborated on the difference between previous community consultations that he had been involved in and the results reported by the CDD inquiry group:

> I have been in many community consultations over time and this seemed to me like I can hear the voices of these community consultations there. It [the previous consultations] is very personalised, their own experience. […] There is not necessarily at the start that sense of a big picture, of a collective will and purpose. And then the contrast, what then happens, is that someone will have their pre-existing purpose and will use the voices to justify that purpose. Whereas what I saw here [referring to the report from the dialogical inquiry] was that people started off with their individual voices and ideas and what happened was that that conversation developed over time. And there was obviously listening, because the suggestions about what are the root causes and the suggestions on how to respond to them are very mature. [...] (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

While the group itself was more interested in interpersonal relationships and becoming friends with each other, they actually produced a sophisticated analysis of community problems and goals. This supports the choice of method of CDD as a thorough yet simple process for intercultural dialogue and social analysis. More importantly, it points to the quality of analysis that can be achieved by ordinary people deeply engaged with a particular social phenomenon (Collier cited in Neilson 2006, p. 392).

5.3.4 Personal transformation and 'growth'

Participating in the dialogical inquiry was not just a positive experience for inquiry members and helping them build relationships with each other, it transformed them on a personal level and gave them courage and energy. D9 was cited above with regards to how she reported a constructive change in interaction attributed to participation in the inquiry process. In the following section she expands on this personal transformation:

> It had a personal effect on me. I tried to open my mind more. To take in all these different views. Because I could see it happen to a lot of cultures. […] Now I am more confident and energetic. […] And I also spread the word and talk to people who are down or who have a problem. And I tell them to encourage. They can go and find work. Because anytime you go somewhere new it is difficult. […] (D9, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

D2, a white settler Australian married to an Aboriginal Australian, validated this statement and added her own reflection below:

> And I second that. Because I am not an out there really confident person like D7. And this was giving me the pathways to now get involved in the multicultural and not just the mainstream and Aboriginal communities. Because I could see the population growing in our area. And I kept thinking I wonder if these people are struggling. […] I am sure some families could do with some encouragement or companionship but I did not know how to go about it. (D2, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

The increase in confidence did not just occur as part of the sustained participation in the inquiry group sessions. Such an increase in confidence became very visible in the behaviour of D10, a Rohingyan refugee from Burma, who attended only two sessions (sessions 6 and 7). D10 spoke very limited English and was brought along by D4, a younger member of his community. D10 at first was very reserved and did not engage much in the conversation. When the other attendees invited him (translated by D4) to tell his story and when everyone actively slowed down the communication so that D4 could translate, this behaviour changed. During the session morning tea was brought in. At first D10 did not eat or drink anything. When he was given the opportunity to actively participate across the language barrier and when he noticed that the other participants encouraged this participation by constantly inviting him to voice his view, this behaviour changed. I could observe that he ate with appetite, that his body language became more open and that he used bigger gestures to stress his points (Researcher journal, CDD session 6, 28 May 2011).

In some of the statements presented above, participants commented on their unease when meeting unfamiliar people from different cultural backgrounds and how the dialogue had given them confidence. This confidence was put on display during a number of public appearances of research participants:

- At a Harmony Day Celebration[20] on 28 March 2012 D2, D4, D6, D7 and D12 expressed how much they got out of attending the Community Café Dialogues and the CDD dialogues in front of more than 100 attendees from various Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse communities in Brisbane.

- D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D9 and D12 formed a community reference group for the ongoing large-group Community Café Dialogues program which is headed by the researcher. As part of a presentation to Wesley Mission Brisbane's Campaign for Change Awards in 2013, they all spoke in front of an awards panel and advocated for more intercultural community dialogue.

[20] Harmony Day 21 March is a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home – from the traditional owners of this land to those who have come from many countries around the world (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2013, <http://www.harmony.gov.au>, visited on 6 September 2013). The celebration occurred one week later on Neighbour Day.

In this section the experiences reported by inquiry participants indicate that equal participation and acknowledgment of personal views and stories by other participants in dialogue can help people increase their self-confidence and assertiveness. In one example this happened during the dialogue process after only a short time of attending the session. Participants who attended the dialogical inquiry on a sustained basis made a number of public statements and appearances supporting the process and reporting on the beneficial effects it had had on them.

5.4 Systemic patterns and effects within the dialogical inquiry group

This next section presents the analysis of systemic effects which the researcher observed during the dialogical inquiry. While the phenomena of downward causation and social emergence were mentioned frequently in this chapter, the following sections will deepen the analysis of these phenomena.

5.4.1 Downward causation and its impact on dialogue participation and contribution

According to the emergence framework that is used as the basis for this research inquiry, future interactions of individuals are constrained by previous interactions which have resulted in emergent and established social structure. The sustained nature of the dialogical inquiry made it possible to observe instances of this downward causation. Many inquiry participants referred back to particular historical narratives and expressed that these narratives had shaped their lives to a great extent. These narratives were expressions of the downward constraint that participants brought into the new micro-system of the dialogical inquiry group. Examples of such downward constraint included idea statements from D4, D10 and D12 recorded during the CDD process which focused on the corruption of government, community leaders and police. These statements were directly based on their personal experiences in Burma and Afghanistan as members of persecuted minorities (Rohingya and Hazara). All three participants experienced police violence and were socialised in a discourse which portrayed members of the police as violent and dangerous. Section 5.3.1 already mentioned the initial fear between D12, a Hazara refugee, and D6, who worked for Queensland Police Service. In the following section D12 explained the source of his fear:

> […] In our country and our culture it is very hard to have that with a police person. Their behaviour is very different with here. [...] When I was the age of ten, twelve, fifteen, when the soldiers together with police person came to the village. And they sought out

> someone to go with them to the office. They forced them, they kicked them, they used some bad word. (D12, focus group 3, 22 November 2011).

The group did not just discuss personal experiences with strong historical narratives. During their CDD analysis they noted the effects of traumatic experiences on integration after people flee from persecution and become refugees in another country:

> […] Those who come from war zones arrive here from a very negative side of the world. They are expected to exist here as a whole person. They have to adjust in so many ways and they have to conform. Some people are older and have lived most of their lives somewhere else. It takes them very long to integrate. They can't just leave their own lives behind. It takes a long time to realise that you don't have to look over your shoulder all the time to be on guard for someone wanting to shoot you. Fear of persecution is unforgettable. It is a part of people's lives. It is important for people with these experiences to share their experiences with other community members. This dialogue is such an opportunity that really helps in talking about this fear. It is important for learning to live like human beings together that we share experiences and that people also listen to terrible experiences. […] (Element 42, CDD problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

The group developed the notion that sharing these life-shaping experiences with others helps processing and dealing with them and allows people to transcend the fear and live peacefully together. Sharing these stories helps to better understand others and to take responsibility for others. Peter Westoby has researched the social dimensions of healing processes among refugees suffering from traumatic experiences in their home countries. He argues that healing invites not just concerns to do with issues of justice and reconciliation, but that healing requires establishing ‘ethical social relationships’ (Westoby 2009, p. 89). Equal participation in sustained dialogue can provide opportunities for such relationships to be built and to address the downward social constraint that these traumatic encounters create in people’s identities.

The above example points to the possibility of dampening positive conflict-exacerbating or traumatic feedback loops through social emergence processes in dialogical encounters. However, negative experiences in unfamiliar cultural settings can also have the opposite effect and develop and entrench discriminatory views. The following example is from D9 who struggled to find work in Australia as a migrant:

> D9 then goes on to talk about her bad experiences with people of Asian background. She thinks that at a lot of job interviews she was not considered because she was blocked by secretaries from Asian backgrounds. She says she has been discriminated by people from Asia and that they are "sweet poison". […] She also had an encounter at the place where she stays with her daughter. Two girls from Asia just turned their backs on her and talked in their own language when D9 walked past. She considered this a deliberate way to show her that she was not welcome. […] (Researcher journal, CDD session 4, 15 May 2011).

This narrative then shaped one of the problem-elements created and documented during the CDD process:

> There is racism from migrant cultures against other migrant cultures. I have experienced people from Asian cultures turn their back towards me and not wanting to talk to me (I am of African background). This was an experience with students. When you come to study here the interest is to study here and then to go back to your country.
>
> There is different treatment by the government. Immigration at the airport is an example. If you have dark skin you are more often interrogated or delayed than if you have white skin. The way that they put the questions is rude, denigrating, it makes you nervous. Officers opened my passport and tried to look whether I had faked my picture. They damaged the paper of the document.
>
> If you are from a different background, you have to work twice as hard, study twice as much and constantly prove yourself. People keep on asking me where I learned my English and they would not believe me or would think that people do not speak English in my home country. Most Africans here are overqualified for the jobs that they are doing but cannot get a better job here. I heard from other students that they feel that their lecturers do not expect them to do well because they come from a different country. There are patients in medical practices who say they do not want to be touched by an African doctor. It hurts when you hear that. I had to sit an English test before coming to Australia although I taught English at university level in my home country. […] (Element 29, CDD problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

I have included the previous two statements for two reasons: firstly, I believe, they show how previous personal experiences shaped a participant's contribution to the dialogical inquiry. D9's experience was clearly reflected in the clarification of element 29. In addition to this it provided the starting point for a discussion with other dialogue participants who added their own stories to the statement. The second paragraph of statement 29 dealing with disrespectful treatment was contributed by D5, as was the third paragraph about not having his qualifications recognised. During the dialogue the different constraining experiences merged into one collective statement which provided a richer and more multidimensional definition of the problem than the original narrative could have. A fusion of stories and experiences took place which will be further investigated later in this chapter.

The previous example focused on how life experiences and historical narratives of participants shaped their contribution of ideas during the inquiry process and how the interaction of the different stories lead to the social emergence of collective thought as part of the dialogue. In the following example D11 provides a reflection on how downward causation can impact on the settlement experience of migrants who interact with other migrants:

> Look, because of my personal limit I am made up of different experiences than others. The story I tell to a friend of mine who has come to Australia as a new migrant is my own experience. It is not the general truth. Or the truth most migrants experience. It is my own experience. If I am successful and if I do well in Australian society I will share that story to my friend. So that friend would have a good chance of communicating with people, getting along in society. But if I have a limited capacity to interact with people and cope with this new environment and someone comes then I would tell that story to

> the person. The way that person then would interact with Australian society is limited to that person's experience, which I am telling to that friend. (D11, focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

This example gives credence to the theory underlying this inquiry that social structure and patterns in society such as discourses about asylum seekers being 'queue jumpers' or white settler Australians being 'arrogant and racist' emerge from a myriad of different interactions between agents in a social system communicating with each other about their experiences and encounters. It points to the tentative conclusion that if the conditions for these interactions and encounters are constructive, respectful and allow a sharing of (even unpleasant) experiences this can produce constructive social patterns that increase social cohesion and positive relationships between people in the macro-system of society.

Downward causation does not only affect the content of contributions, it can also prevent people from participating in the first place. The inquiry group members frequently wondered why their own efforts to encourage others to join the inquiry group were often not successful. The group labelled this problem as "fear of the other" and mentioned a lack of knowledge about what to expect in cross-cultural encounters and an uncertainty on how to behave. An explanation which again highlights downward causation through historical narratives, was the statement about members of the Stolen Generations below:

> […] Aboriginal people who are stolen generation find it really hard to identify who they are themselves and to get acceptance within their own communities. It is even harder for them to connect with other communities. This problem could also affect other people, for example from Africa, who were taken from their land or removed from their families through war. (Element 59, CDD problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

The downward causation does not always have to come from traumatic experiences. Participants discussed that sometimes interaction with peers from the same cultural group can pressure people into conforming or not 'sticking their heads up':

> D2 talks about how hard it can be to be nice to people from your out-group when your in-group sees this as inappropriate. Aboriginal people call […] other Aboriginals who allegedly do not behave in proper ways "coconuts". This refers to the concept that they are black on the outside but white on the inside and they are not real Aboriginals. Apparently D3 has been called a coconut before. […] (Researcher journal, CDD session 7, 4 June 2011).

Because of downward causation and past experiences people self-select not to engage in particular interactions or even visit particular locations. It was shown how dialogue can help participants process some of the constraint-inducing fears through authentic exchange of stories. In spite of this, if the constraint is too strong then these people may not participate in a dialogical interaction in the first place.

Downward causation can also be manifested in place. In the conceptual framework of this thesis, it was discussed that social structure can include infrastructure, buildings and other objects. This infers that social structure can be embedded in place and can constrain the behaviour and interactions of people in particular locations. Established patterns can make people with different world views conform to what they believe are majority rules and habits. This is expressed in the following anecdote:

> […] Brisbane is a white culture. How often do you see black African people walk around? You try to restrain yourself that you can't interact freely. In African culture people are not using prams, they are carrying their babies on their backs. But African women here are not confident enough to do that in the city. They think they have to use prams. In Moorooka they carry their babies on their backs. That's because there are more of their own people there. People try to fit into the dominant culture. The dominant culture is free to make mistakes and to be adventurous, but the minority cultures are not free to do that. (CDD Problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

The social practice of “not carrying babies on the back of the mother” shows that structure can be anchored to place and does not necessarily need to be expressed verbally to form a discourse. Even though it is not likely that people would comment negatively about a woman carrying her baby on her back through the Brisbane Central Business District, simply not seeing anyone engage in this practice establishes certain social structure that prevents nurturing habits that are perceived to be quite normal in other places in Brisbane.[21]

In line with the idea of downward causation, this section has provided examples on how the dialogical inquiry process and its analysis were influenced by historical narratives and personal experiences. Some of these were direct experiences from the dialogue participants, others were based on their analysis during the CDD inquiry. Downward causation can inhibit people from participating in dialogical encounters, even though these encounters could lessen the pressure and trauma of such experiences. Moreover, downward causation can influence social practice and can be imbued in place. Lastly, the examples from the inquiry process indicated that in a dialogical encounter different historical narratives can come together and form a collective new narrative. This will be explored in more detail in the following section.

5.4.2 Fusion of horizons can lead to collective thinking

The previous section not only indicated that interpersonal interaction is strongly shaped by previous interaction and experiences, as expressed in the conceptual

[21] The suburb of Moorooka mentioned in the statement is ca. 8km distance from the Brisbane Central Business District. Many migrants from African countries have settled there.

framework. It also referred to what Hans-Georg Gadamer has called a ‘fusion of horizons’ in dialogue. According to Gadamer (2011, pp. 304-5) a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that the participants bring with them. They form the horizon of the present. What emerges from dialogue is the logos which belongs to no participant in the dialogue individually but which transcends the interlocutors’ subjective knowledge and opinions so that even the person leading the conversation realises that he or she does not know. Concepts are formed through working out the common meaning (Gadamer 2011, p. 361). Dialogue is not about finding the one true statement or vision, it is about adding different experiences for a collective joint vision. The following quote is an example of how different experiences from inquiry group participants were combined into a collective concept:

> In the West people have existed in the primacy of the individual. In other places people have existed in the primacy of the collective. It is a trend in development and modernisation to move from the collective to the individual. When communities come to Australia (white Australia is individualist) they are collectivist peoples, but here they turn towards the individualism. […] An example is a group of Sudanese youths at a park or at a train station: everyone (in mainstream society) assumes that they are up to no good because they are not individualist. The youths are just living out their collectivist identities. This is the same for Aboriginal young people. At [name removed] State School there were always groups of Samoan young people playing cricket or footy. If Aboriginal young people would do this, they would be booked by the police. […] An African child is a son or daughter to the whole community. An uncle can discipline a child. Here the uncle has no right. (Element 18, CDD problem-mapping document, 11 June 2011).

The above statement is a more complete version of the statement introduced in section 5.2.1 above. In this statement it is almost impossible to disentangle the different experiences and narratives which flow into and through each other. Much of the more abstract theoretical parts of the statement were contributed by D5. The story about the high school was contributed by D7. There were also contributions from other participants. What emerges is a comparison between migrant and First Nations experiences based on collective input from the group. The result is a collage of different thoughts and experiences which form one collective statement. It was pointed out in section 4.5.1 of the previous chapter that CDD/IM practice demands the authenticity of individual idea statements (Laouris, Michaelides, et al. 2009, p. 55). What happened during the clarification phase was that when asking clarifying questions participants also compared ideas to their own stories and experiences. These experiences were then often adopted by the originator of a statement and therefore became part of the original clarification.

The emergence of such collective thought did not stop with the group writing it down using the ISM software. In the following example the idea of celebrating and valuing

holidays of different cultural groups was mentioned for the first time in the following vision-mapping statement:

> Identifying the values that bring us together. An example are festivals: festivals are contemporary. […] There are too many festivals and events that are still strongly associated with a certain cultural origin, for example the State of Origin football match or St Patrick's Day. New and emerging communities do not attend many of these. […] What we should try is to create a more balanced society in which St Patrick's Day is just as important as African Day or Invasion Day and where all people feel welcome to celebrate. […] It may not be possible to make every holiday a public holiday. But it is possible to raise awareness and acknowledge each other's celebration days as important events through advertising, messages etc. (Element 4, CDD vision-mapping document, 15 October 2011).

During the action-planning phase of the CDD process the group then decided to address this goal in the following project statement:

> Encourage elders to come to different community events, for example Aboriginal Elders to cultural events such as World Refugee Day.
>
> What? Reciprocal invitations so that Aboriginal Elders attend migrant and refugee celebrations and migrant and refugee Elders attend NAIDOC Day celebration.[22]
>
> Who? D7 to take charge of organising NAIDOC Day attendance. D4 and D12 to take charge of World Refugee Day attendance.
>
> When? First Friday in July 2012. Black Friday. D4 and D12 will advise the group about the date for World Refugee Day 2012.
>
> Where? NAIDOC Day in Musgrave Park, West End.
>
> How? D7 to talk to Uncle [name removed]. about putting up a multicultural tent at NAIDOC Day. Then D7 will let us know if this can work. D4 will send invitation for World Refugee Day. (CDD action-planning document, 29 October 2011).

All the participants mentioned in the action project then worked together to ensure more cross-cultural participation at the events and attended events that they would have not attended otherwise. D4 and D7 worked together to bring more Aboriginal Elders to the World Refugee Day celebration. Afterwards the group informed me that this plan had succeeded and that there were twice as many Aboriginal Elders in attendance than the year before. D4 and D12 (together with some other people from their communities) attended a small NAIDOC celebration in the south of Brisbane that was far away from where they lived because they had been invited by D7 and D2. These are examples of

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[22] NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. Its origins can be traced to the emergence of Aboriginal groups in the 1920′s which sought to increase awareness in the wider community of the status and treatment of Indigenous Australians. NAIDOC Week is held in the first full week of July. It is a time to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and achievements and is an opportunity to recognise the contributions that Indigenous Australians make to our country and our society (retrieved from www.naidoc.org.au).

how action ideas developed within the dialogical inquiry group, extended into the meso- and exo-systems of group members.

The emergence of collective ideas into collective action supports the concept of upward emergence discussed in the conceptual framework in section 3.2.1 of the thesis. Participants verbally expressed their own experiences to each other. This interaction created ephemeral and stable emergents which then manifested in the social structure of the CDD document and the CDD action plan. Then they implemented this action plan and included people outside the dialogue micro-system. The CDD process helped to nurture and structure this fusion of horizons and encouraged the creation of social structure through documentation and visualisation. This helped to capture and affirm ephemeral emergents and encouraged the creation of more stable emergents and structure.

5.4.3 Experiences of dialogic moments

Martin Buber has identified moments in dialogue processes when participants 'turn to each other' and receive each other fully as human beings (Black 2008, p. 95; Friedman 2005, p. 29). In dialogue participants open themselves to the otherness of the person they meet (Friedman 2005, p. 30). I was able to observe such moments during the dialogical inquiry. They were characterised by deep empathy between participants, active listening and respectful and gentle questioning. Examples of when these moments occurred included D9's recounting of her frustrated experience of finding a job in Australia mentioned in the previous section, D4's description of his life in a Bangladeshi refugee camp and D12's explanation of why he had to leave Afghanistan and why he used a people smuggler to bring him to Australia. These were all very personal accounts in which the participants telling them did not speak on behalf of their communities but simply related their own stories. They led to moments of silence and some discomfort on behalf of the listeners. D7 started crying when she heard about D4's description of the brutality with which Rohingyan refugees were treated by Bangladeshi communities in proximity to the refugee camp. My researcher journal shows fifteen entries in which I commented on these 'dialogic moments'. In each of them one or more participants told personal stories which resonated with all of us in the room.

Storytelling itself is not enough for dialogic moments to occur. However, Laura Black argues that stories 'bring people's experiences and perspectives to the conversation in a powerful way that is qualitatively different from issue-oriented discussion' (2008, p. 99). Stories can help create the conditions for dialogic moments because they help group

members to ‘negotiate the tension between self and other in their interactions’ (Black 2008, p. 109).

While participants often talked in a lighthearted and joking manner with each other, in these moments the conversation was very serious. Photos taken during some of these occasions show participants clearly turning towards the speaker with an open posture and interested facial expression. Listeners rarely interrupted the speaker. They listened carefully and then asked (often in quiet voices) clarifying questions or elicited more details.

I have found it difficult to capture the essence of these moments in writing and do not think that I was able to do so in my researcher journal, or even through the use of photos during the dialogue process. An example of this struggle is the following brief excerpt:

> There were a number of dialogic moments (in the spirit of Buber) when people turned towards each other and acknowledged each other's pain. Particularly D9’s stories brought forward some powerful listening. I would have loved D4 to be present, since I would have liked to see if his gentle personality and his Burmese background would have made a positive impact on D9. I think there is the possibility if D9 remains a participant that some powerful shift could happen that I might be able to track. (Researcher journal, CDD session 4, 28 May 2011).

I could observe and comment on body language, attentive listening and careful respectful questions, but this did not capture the palpable mood of human connection in the room. It also did not capture my own emotional and physiological reactions to the conversation. This difficulty in capturing the essence of dialogic moments has been observed by Black, who describes them as ‘fleeting, typically unplanned, instances where partners experience both present and open to the other’s experience’ (2008, p. 98).

An important factor which supported these dialogic moments was the size of the group. In spite of the fact that participants often tried to encourage family and friends to come with them and to participate, the core inquiry group was relatively small. This was found to be helpful because it allowed for more personal sharing of experience since fewer people needed to talk. The participants compared their experience in the CDD process with their experience in the larger Community Café Dialogues from which they were recruited. They found that the smaller group provided opportunity for deeper discussion. Some participants were initially disappointed that others would not join, but at the last action research analysis focus group in 2013, the small group was considered to be a strength of the process.

5.5 The role of the process and of the researcher

As facilitator and researcher I had a unique relationship to the action inquiry group. I was not an outsider-researcher but I prepared and guided the CDD sessions and therefore had a profound impact on the content. D5 summarised this in the following section:

> You did a fantastic job, Serge, in terms of interpreting some of the things we said. By saying them differently. We contributed in whatever language, in whatever way we did a contribution. (D5, Focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

As a mediator and facilitator I utilised summarising and reframing techniques (Caton Campbell & Docherty 2003-2004) to assist the participants to express themselves concisely and clearly. D7 points this out in the following statement:

> D7 explained about a recent phone call she had from a young Aboriginal man who was furious. She explained how she calmed him down and how the dialogue helped her develop those skills. [...] When we engage in the brainstorming I often assist D7 and D4 to reframe their statements to make them shorter or more concise. I use general interest-based question techniques or mediation reframes which still stay fairly close to the original statement. D7 has picked up on that and remarked a number of times that I help her to make the statement sound good and to assist her expressing herself. […] (Researcher Journal, CDD session 10, 23 July 2011).

I need to acknowledge that these communication interventions influenced the way the conversation was conducted and may have influenced the wording of some of the statements from the CDD inquiry. It is interesting to note that D7 commented that she herself developed these skills simply by participating in the dialogue, because no explicit training or discussion of these skills was provided.

Throughout the inquiry process I was conscious of my own influence on the conversations of participants. Towards the end of the data collection the group asked about the future of the dialogue and further meetings. I acknowledged my position of power as the coordinator and organiser of the inquiry group gatherings and indicated that I felt I needed to step back. Participants then confirmed that it was important to have a coordinator who creates the space for people to come together in dialogue and who guides the discussion:

> Researcher: I mean it is also important for me to, in a way, step back and let you handle things. At least I feel I should not always be convening or inviting or suggesting. Because through that I constantly control. And I would like to give more and more of this control to you. And assist you in shaping the future conversation. [...]
> D3: But you still need a coordinator. We are all of different backgrounds. You need someone...
> D2: A facilitator.
> D3: Someone to facilitate the general meetings. We are all from different backgrounds. We need someone. We need some central point, someone who says we have a meeting on the eleventh for example, come along. And who will guard and chair the meeting from there. (Focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

George Lakey (2010) discusses the development of a social order for learning in adult training courses and university education. He argues that to learn, people need to take risks to unlearn old prejudices and to revise conceptual frameworks. To do this requires a "social order that supports safety" and Lakey calls this a 'container'. 'A strong container has walls thick enough to hold a group doing even turbulent work, with individuals willing to be vulnerable in order to learn' (Lakey 2010). This description of the learning environment can be compared to the container created during the dialogical inquiry. The participants stated how much the inquiry process changed their personal conceptual frameworks and their interactions.

David Bohm has a different perspective on the role of the facilitator. He acknowledges the value of a facilitator in the beginning stages of dialogue, 'but his function is to work himself out of a job' (2004, p. 17). Bohm's argument is that dialogue participants become less and less reliant on the facilitator over time. This is congruent with the emergence framework, as the sustained meetings allow the group to establish ephemeral and stable emergents. These take the form of group rules and behaviours that over time become the new social structure of the group, which regulates interaction and tacit rules of behaviour. On the other hand, the participants in this study emphasised the importance of the facilitator even at the end of the dialogical inquiry. They pointed out that it is not just the facilitation in the room, it is also the role of an organiser or convenor that is important to ensure a sustained dialogue process. Despite the fact that the inquiry has shown that processes like CDD can be easily learned by participants and they can take over much of the role of the facilitator, I do not fully agree with Bohm. Throughout the inquiry I noted that it was helpful for participants to have a facilitator who can focus discussion or move the conversation along. Even though there are times where more, and other times where less, intervention was needed, I do not agree that a facilitator can fully step out of the process. Facilitators are integral to encouraging conditions for a safe learning container and they can even become symbols of this, encouraging such an environment without intervening more directly.

The process of 'being facilitated' can be liberating for participants. D5 was one of the conveners of the large group Community Café Dialogues during which the research participants were recruited. As such, he played the role of facilitator in these dialogue sessions which preceded the dialogical inquiry. He commented on the liberating experience of his change in role:

> It has impacted on me. Now I had a free hand in terms of talking. I had a free hand in giving my opinion freely, in engaging directly without being seen as domineering.

> Transpiring from facilitator to participant means that you have a voice to speak. And you can engage with people, sometimes more directly, as opposed to leading from behind. [...] (D5, Focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

While it was on the one hand liberating for the participants to be guided through the discussion, I noticed how much my own experiences became part of the dialogical inquiry. On a number of occasions the participants asked me to contribute my own experiences and views on particular topics. When mediating disputes I normally refrain from doing so and use a minimalist intervention approach, ensuring that outcomes are based on the ideas of the participants and not my own (Boulle 2011, p. 37). During the inquiry I felt somewhat conflicted when participants asked for my view, but given that I could speak from personal experience about certain topics, I felt obliged to answer their requests for an authentic conversation between equals. The following example illustrates such a situation:

> When we talked about the lack of recognition of skills and experience of migrants the group asked me about my qualifications. I explained that my legal qualifications from Germany are not accepted here without further training. This made the group angry. I feel slightly embarrassed because I feel that my own migrant experience is a very good one compared to others. I am white, well-educated, financially secure. We talked about the experience at the airport when we arrive in Australia and I told the story that the immigration staff is very polite. […] (Researcher journal, CDD session 4, 7 May 2011).

I took great care not to make my own statements and contributions part of the CDD process or input them into the ISM software, but they have nevertheless impacted upon and influenced the discussion of the participants. Whenever I thought that statements were based on ideas that I had presented I pointed this out to the group and asked them if they wanted to reconsider them or delete them from the text input. However, it needs to be recognised that my facilitation could be challenged as an issue of reliability and authenticity of the data. In line with Neuman's argument about the difficulty of using a consistent research method in a complex constantly changing system (2006, p. 196), I consider my relationship to the inquiry an evolving process. It is part of my reflective methodology to acknowledge these connections and potential problems and to present them here in these findings (Brydon-Miller 2008, p. 205). The aim is to highlight my own involvement as a process facilitator with significant control over the flow of the conversation and even the way it was framed, as well as a contributor to the content in the form of ideas discussed during the dialogical inquiry.

In addition to my influence on the process and content of discussion, I was able to observe certain changes in participant behaviour which may be connected to the aspect of my function as a role model for dialogical communication. I noted the following in my researcher journal about the influence of my facilitation:

> I am also starting to wonder how personal expressions, interventions, facilitation techniques are being picked up. My behaviour of "hosting" the conversation, greeting people, offering them coffee and biscuits, providing food and a safe space for them. I can see others starting to host the space. Maybe that's why D4 gives us yoghurt or why D7 wants to adopt us as sons. We are all giving and hosting and making each other comfortable. The dialogue has become a dominant frame in itself and the answer to a lot of the problems. [...] So how much of that am I influencing/causing? Probably quite a bit, but it is impossible to reduce this to a clear psychological influence which starts with me and impacts on the behaviour of the others. This is more than the sum of its parts. We are creating these frames together. Because we are enjoying the conversation, we want to recreate the conversation, the learning space, the hosting, the listening. We feel good in it. And that's not a bad thing because it is a peaceful frame which we want to intentionally spread outward into other meso-systems. Positive feedback is at work here. We are all reinforcing the dialogue frame through friendliness and reinforce respectful, open and honest conversation. This also comes out in the evaluations at the end of each session. The group applauds itself for being open, honest, empathic and then suggests to continue this, to try even harder, to bring more people in the following week to extend the frame to them. [...] (Researcher journal, CDD session 7, 4 June 2011).

What I described in this except from my researcher journal is an extension of the responsibility for holding the container. Lakey argues that in the beginning of a learning process, it is the facilitator's job to create and hold the container for safe learning. But this is reciprocated by the actions of the participants who start taking responsibility for the encounter. Lakey (2010) mentions in the same section behaviours like non-put-down humour, authentic conversation during the breaks, helping to set up the site and clean up in the end, providing food to share with others, admitting confusion and supporting each other when the discussion becomes upsetting. I have witnessed all of these behaviours being exhibited by members of the dialogical inquiry group. In this regard Bohm's point about facilitators working themselves out of their job is certainly valid, as a lot of the set-up, clean-up and hosting work necessary for the dialogical inquiry sessions was taken over by the participants.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the first part of the research findings. It has established the importance of acknowledging the content of the dialogical inquiry as data for understanding the process of dialogue by showing how participants did not separate the content of inquiry from the process. Inquiry participants identified a lack of dialogical encounter and generative interaction as one of the major barriers that hinder more cohesive intercultural community relations. The group committed to working dialogically and to spreading the generative interaction they had developed beyond the micro-system of the dialogue group. It therefore recognised the importance of dialogical engagement.

Participation in the dialogical inquiry had significant effects on participants and, according to their view, changed their relationships and interaction for the better. These changes included a breaking down of barriers which was accomplished through the sharing of personal experience and life stories. The participation in the dialogue improved interactions between dialogue participants and their interactions with others in their meso-systems. It also assisted them to develop better analytical understanding of community problems and ways to articulate this to others as was confirmed by peer-network participants. Individual participants reported a positive personal transformation that included increased confidence and attitude towards other cultural groups.

The chapter then pointed out a number of systemic effects that occurred during the inquiry; participation and contribution was strongly influenced by downward causation resulting from past interactions. This could even explain the ongoing struggle of the group to recruit further members. In some cases, this downward constraint prevented participation in dialogical processes. While this constraint was always in effect, the dialogical encounter allowed for a fusion of horizons and the development of collective understanding and ideas. This was more than a counter-effect to individual constraint as it allowed for the creation of new collective ideas which emerged into social structure. Some of these new ideas and frames manifested in action plans implemented by the group outside the micro-system of the dialogue.

The exact moments when such fusion of horizons occurred were difficult to capture. Sometimes they were preceded by the telling of powerful personal stories which encouraged active listening by participants. The experiences described by members of the inquiry group support Black's (2008) research findings that storytelling can harness dialogic moments.

Finally, the role of the researcher was discussed as being an integral part of the collective meaning-making process. This confirms the epistemological starting point of co-construction of social reality and affirms the view that interveners in conflict resolution or peacebuilding processes are always part of the system that they intervene in. As researcher I reflected on my role and influence in the process and documented observations of their effects and of my own relationships with the inquiry participants. While this interaction made it more difficult to determine which ideas or frames of interaction originated from inquiry participants it allowed for generative behaviours and frames to spread from the facilitator/researcher to the other participants in the dialogue. The chapter has already touched upon the interaction between the micro-system of the

dialogue and the meso-systems of participants by confirming the views of participants through data collected from the peer network interviews. This connection will be further examined in the following chapter which details the findings with regards to the processes of outward emergence from the dialogue group into the peer networks.

6. Research findings 2: the journey from idea to action and the outward emergence beyond the dialogical inquiry group

The second findings chapter traces the emergence process from an initial idea conceived during the dialogical inquiry to collective action which occurred outside the micro-system of the dialogue group. Moreover, the chapter presents the results of the interviews with participants from the peer networks of inquiry group members. This data is used to examine systemic resonance between the dialogical inquiry and the peer network inquiry. The conceptual framework that this thesis is based on posits that there is a two-way interaction between micro-system and meso-systems, and that social emergence processes are at the same time impacted upon through downward causation from previous interaction. To investigate this further, peer network participants were asked about their own impact on the dialogical inquiry and on the dialogical inquiry's impact outside its micro-system.

The chapter addresses research question two, which focuses on the experiences of peer network participants and their views on their relationship to the dialogical inquiry. The research findings in this chapter go beyond the researcher notes and focus group recordings presented in the previous chapter, and include interviews with peer network participants and observations of community events in which inquiry participants took part. What is presented is again a selection of the available data which responds best to the research question and what is anticipated as the micro-macro link between the inquiry group and the communities intersecting with it. Appendix 6 contains the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with peer network participants.

The first part of the chapter describes the 'idea generation' process from the dialogical inquiry group outside, into other meso-, exo- and macro-systems. The second part focuses on the data gathered from interviews with the peer network participants and allows for triangulation of data created by the inquiry group, as well as a critical review of the impact of the dialogical inquiry into the surrounding communities.

6.1 Outward emergence of ideas from the dialogue group to their peer networks

The conceptual framework in Chapter Three of this thesis argued that social change in complex systems starts with interpersonal interaction in micro-systems. The ephemeral and stable emergents created in these micro-systems are being carried outward by the micro-system participants and are transmitted into their meso-systems. In other words,

ideas that are being voiced during dialogue and deliberation processes can sometimes 'catch on' and be transferred outside the dialogue environment into the peer networks of participants. The following three action ideas are examples of this process: (i) increasing the cross-cultural attendance of elders at community events; (ii) organising more large-group dialogical encounters; and (iii) a multicultural advisory committee for schools.

6.1.1. Increasing cross-cultural attendance of elders at community events

During the first two months of the dialogical inquiry the group often shared ideas about how they or their peers connected with other communities. In session 6 the researcher asked D10 and D4 to explain the way their community connected with others. This gave rise to an action plan.

> I ask D10 if he had a chance to connect much with other communities in Brisbane. D4 explains that he has organised a number of celebrations through a settlement service provider [name removed]. That's when Rohingyans met other communities in Brisbane. D7 asks if Aboriginal people were present. D4 does not think so. This points to an interesting realisation. While everyone who has contact with them appreciates the great work that settlement service providers are doing there is little contact between the new emerging communities that they assist and the Aboriginal communities. […] I ask if D4 and D7 want to work together to connect these events better with Aboriginal elders. They agree to this idea. I write it down on the project idea sheet. D4 explains that he has got good connections with P3 from the service provider. He suggests the World Refugee Day on 26 June 2011. We note down the date and venue on the whiteboard. D7 writes down the date. I suggest that they get in touch with each other. D7 wants to bring some elders. (Researcher journal, CDD session 6, 28 May 2011).

The idea generated was followed up by D7 who reported back at the next dialogue meeting:

> She told other elders about World Refugee Day and they all want to come. She said: "We'll have a busload of Aboriginal elders coming to World Refugee Day. D4 invited me and we will come."(Researcher journal, CDD session 7, 4 June 2011).

The group members proceeded to implement this action idea at the World Refugee Day celebration. At the ninth meeting of the CDD dialogue group the group reflected on their experience of the World Refugee Day community event in 2011:

> […] D7 thought it [World Refugee Day] went really well and was very impressed by the interactions of Aboriginal elders and other community elders. She mentioned that she and other Aboriginals felt respected and welcome. D11 explained that attendance was good if not outstanding and that the number of Aboriginal elders (12) doubled compared to last year. […] D2 mentions later that not many white Anglo-Australians attended World Refugee Day.[…] (Researcher journal, CDD session 9, 16 July 2011).

D5 also commented on his experience and observations on the day:

> The stories told by the elders were moving and interesting. D7 and another elder [name removed] moved around a lot and welcomed people, this helped others to feel

> included. D7 added that she bought a scarf from an African stall and talked about how she thinks her communication across language barriers has improved through the dialogue. […] At some stage an elder from the Togolese community entered the tent. He does not speak much English. D7 welcomed and kissed him. D5 remarked that in the beginning the Togolese elder was uncomfortable, but that D7's heartfelt welcome changed that. D5 said that the Togolese man was extremely happy and comfortable with the Aboriginal elders in the tent and enjoyed this. He felt so welcome. [...] (Researcher journal, CDD session 10, 23 July 2011).

These journal entries trace the creation of a collective action idea to its implementation at the World Refugee Day event. Initially I was the one to voice the idea to address the lack of connection between refugee and migrant communities and First Nations communities. But then the idea was picked up by the group and the group members chose a particular event and developed a plan to implement it within their peer networks. What I find significant is that the reflection after the event shows that the relational frames that were developed amongst group members in the micro-system of the dialogue emerged outwards into their peer networks and influenced the event.

6.1.1.1 Outward emergence of pro-social group behaviour

This section will further discuss the outward emergence of pro-social behaviour from the inquiry group into the peer networks. The data presented in the previous section, to me, points to the conclusion that it is not just ideas which emerge outside the dialogue, but frames of interaction and quality of relationships. D5 describes how D7 hugs and kisses the Togolese elder and how she helps create a hospitable and welcoming atmosphere. This frame was carried outwards, outside the micro-system of the inquiry group and into a different social setting (the World Refugee Day community event).

On a more abstract level, I interpret this finding as an indication that conflict resolution processes such as dialogue do not just impact on communities through the particular ideas that are developed in problem-solving discussions, but through the relationship transformation that takes place between participants. While there was no other data available to further substantiate this potential, I argue that dialogical encounters have the potential to create emergents which encourage participants to replicate pro-social - dialogical - interactive norms outside the dialogue environment. This relationship between dialogic encounters and subsequent stabilising of pro-social norms has yet to receive any substantial attention in the scholarly literature.

The inquiry group expressed the importance of such pro-social norms in the vision-map developed by the inquiry group. The most important goal identified was ‘Providing people with due respect and a lived experience of this respect’ (CDD Vision-mapping

document, 15 October 2011). Judith Innes and David Booher (2010, p. 35) suggest that many of the most valuable outcomes of dialogical collaborations are not specific outcomes articulated during the process but that such dialogical encounters can affect a system by changing attitudes, relationships and capabilities of agents. The conditions for this emergence of pro-social norms and constructive interaction, according to the authors, include full diversity of interests among participants, interdependence of the participants, who cannot satisfy their interests without the help of others, and the engagement of all in a face-to-face authentic dialogue (Innes & Booher 2010, p. 35). These conditions are similar to the conditions for effective group work identified by James Surowiecki (2004), which were already mentioned in relation to the CDD process and the research methodology in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The inquiry participants have noted at other times that they exhibit these welcoming and inclusive behaviours outside the dialogical inquiry and that they have learned them from participating in the inquiry group. In addition to the examples presented in Chapter Five, D2 described how she changed her behaviour and established better connections in her local neighbourhood:

> D2: We live in Inala.[23] There is a lot of migration and family groups and that. And just to say 'hello' as they pass down the busy street. And those people often think they are invisible. Nobody will pick up somebody with black skin. We will look the other way. And talk to them. And kids. They are lovely.
>
> Researcher: So you have done this more?
>
> D2: Yes. Because I was nervous, too, whether they reject me. (D2, focus group 4, 26 November 2011).

As discussed in Chapter Five the dialogical inquiry appeared to have provided some participants with the confidence, self-awareness and communication skills to reach out to others in their meso-systems and exo-systems and to build better and more respectful relationships. These collective ideas have taken hold and have become stable emergents that individual participants transfer into their peer networks. I argue, that the data presented here can be interpreted as showing that this reaching out does not just happen through specifically articulated projects such as the World Refugee Day elders meeting, but more so through the emergence of changed relationship frames and attitudes (greeting others on the street, embracing them at meetings).

D6 and other members of the inquiry group mentioned on a number of occasions that they told friends, family and work colleagues about the dialogical inquiry and that they

[23] Suburb on the south side of Brisbane.

were spreading the ideas developed in the dialogue through their peer networks. D4 commented that he often went from the meeting of the dialogical inquiry group to a meeting with his community:

> After finishing at 1.00pm I will go there to my community and I give the basic information. This is what we learned from this dialogue. This dialogue is very important for us. They say “yes, it’s very important.” (D4, focus group 1, 21 May 2011).

Other participants acknowledged that they talked to people in their peer networks about the ideas developed in the dialogue group and tried to actively recruit others to join the inquiry group. D12 and D13 were recruited by D4 and D11 respectively. Some of the effects of these discussions will be reported further below in the section which presents data from peer network participants.

6.1.1.2 Development of creative ideas

The inquiry group was asked about their experiences of the creative idea generation process. At a more abstract level this question asks about how ideas develop in groups and how groups make decisions about which ideas to follow and which to discard. This decision-making is often considered to be more a part of deliberation than of dialogue processes (Black 2008, p. 94). In the example above the initial idea-generating question was posed by the researcher. During the third focus group the participants were asked to describe how the ideas for action plans and projects were initially developed and how they then implemented them after the dialogical inquiry. The statements below provide insights into the experiences of some of the participants with regards to this process:

> We were looking at the issues. We were able to identify what these issues are and how. […] Put them into practical projects, how we were going to achieve them and spreading, what we are already doing, the dialogue to the other people. And then looking at the changes at the end of this. […] (D6, focus group 3, 22 October 2013).

> D6: […] At some point you probably thought, oh, it would be great if this and this was to be done. And then we come here to the table and we talk. And then one person’s idea gives you another idea. And it all develops from that. For example, when we were looking at […] cultural diversity in schools, you know, how are we going to do that? And some people thought maybe we could have little dialogues in schools. And I was thinking maybe we’ll develop a subject that focuses more on culture and all of those things. So for me it is both.
>
> D7: I agree with that. We have come here and learned to respect each other. No matter who we are we are all human beings.
>
> D12: Same. Same. (Focus group 3, 22 October 2011).

D6 clearly stated that ideas are created collectively. Participants had their own ideas based on previous experience in the form of downward causation, but then these ideas

change through interaction in the dialogical inquiry. Ideas from one participant spark ideas from the others and then through discussion they lead to a project idea or action plan.

Keith Sawyer (2007, pp. 14-7) has researched the phenomenon of innovation generation in groups. He notes the following seven key characteristics of effective teams:

1.Innovation emerges over time.

2. Successful collaborative teams practice deep listening.

3. Team members build on their collaborators' ideas.

4. Only afterwards does the meaning of each idea become clear.

5. Surprising questions emerge.

6. Innovation is inefficient.

7. Innovation emerges from the bottom up.

A number of these characteristics were found in the research data. The idea generation process emerged over time and was refined over a number of sessions. Participants often referred to the deep listening and respectful communication that they were involved in during the dialogue. They built on each others' ideas as was pointed out above. Another phenomenon that was found in the data was what Sawyer calls the emergence of surprising questions. The inquiry process was not solely focused on finding answers and action plans. Consistent with Sawyer's findings (2007, p. 16) new questions emerged during the dialogical inquiry and new problems were discussed.

Sawyer's research (Sawyer 2003) is mostly based on his work with improv. actors and jazz musicians, quite a different situation from the intercultural dialogical inquiry. However, the similarities are quite striking between Sawyer's findings and the findings generated with the participant group in this thesis project. Sawyer himself recognises the difference between relatively unstructured groups such as improvised theatre and more structured teams such as workplace project groups or committees. One distinction he develops is between *problem-solving* creative tasks and *problem-finding* creative tasks (Sawyer 2007, pp. 45-6). Work teams, much like conflict resolution and peacebuilding interveners, are often involved in problem-solving tasks, while improv. theatre and improv. jazz performers are participating in problem-finding tasks in which they engage in defining and sometimes even creating the problem in the first place. According to Sawyer (2007, p. 46) some of the most radical innovations occur in *problem-finding* tasks when the question or goal is not known in advance and the key to improvised innovation is to establish a goal that provides a focus for the team but is open-ended enough for problem-finding creativity

to emerge. At the start of the CDD inquiry I have attempted to frame the inquiry as a problem-finding exercise by asking the group to define their own triggering question for the CDD process. I asked each participant to state to the group what their objectives for participation in the process were. There was considerable discussion about which question to use for the CDD process. In addition to this, the brainstorming part of the Nominal Group Technique stage further encouraged the group to think about the meaning of 'barriers between communities'.

In the context of engineering highly complex socio-technological systems Bar-Yam makes a similar suggestion to Sawyer's: group and system managers should not specify the actual mechanisms or structures of engineering solutions of the problem. They should expect a diversity of unforeseen possible solutions of different aspects of the problem and trust that over time the right one will be adopted eventually (Bar-Yam 2004, p. 236). This differentiation between problem-finding and problem-solving interaction is similar to the distinction between dialogue and deliberation (Black 2008, pp. 94-5).

Dialogue is considered to be more free-form and focused on group learning while deliberation is about decision-making in light of particular goals and problems. Because of its technical focus, a problem-solving triggering question and decision-making in Nominal Group Technique and Interpretive Structural Modelling, the CDD/IM process sits more comfortably in the area of deliberation. However, as the research data indicated, it provided the conditions for dialogic moments to occur and for problem-finding interactions which changed the relationships of the participants. Contrary to the view of David Bohm, who considered true dialogue only possible without any structural constraints and who even thought to do away with the role of the facilitator (Bohm 2004, p. 17), the research data points to the conclusion that dialogic moments can happen as part of deliberation processes and that deliberation and dialogue can be combined for effective group work.

6.1.2 Organising more large-group dialogical encounters

This section provides another example of how a creative idea emerged upwards and outwards from the inquiry group. Early on during the inquiry the group discussed the importance of spreading the dialogue from the small group back to a large group by bringing together many more members of different communities. Since the participants were recruited at the end of the first Community Café Dialogue series they already had an experience of such a large-group intercultural dialogue. This was mentioned in focus group 1 by D4:

> […] It is very important for everyone so I already talked to our community and also other communities and they also tell me “please organise a big group to come everyone”. […] I will discuss with settlement service provider [name removed] very soon to give me one room. […] They already offered for a room for the community. That we can invite to every community leader to other people to come to learn something to settle here. (D4, focus group 1, 21 May 2011).

This idea was picked up again in the action planning phase of the dialogue and led to the project idea to organise a larger intercultural community dialogue and to invite politicians and decision-makers (CDD project planning document, 29 November 2011). Given my previous role in organising and facilitating these dialogues the group asked me to take the lead and to apply for funding. In the following year members of the dialogical inquiry group became reference group members and supporters of another series of large-group Community Café Dialogues. D7 personally asked the Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd for a letter of support for the funding organisation which the then Foreign Minister subsequently provided. This idea and action plan was communicated into the peer networks of participants as demonstrated below:

> I think D12 was looking at maybe at some point applying for funding and engaging in wider dialogue. (P2, peer network interview, 25 May 2012).

> She [D6] kept on speaking about this concept of bringing the community together. But bringing different people from different cultures together. (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012).

Related to the idea of extending the dialogue to a larger group was the action idea from the dialogue group of documenting the dialogical inquiry outcomes and sharing them with other communities and with government. The precursor of this idea was suggested early in session 3 of the dialogical inquiry:

> Today we also developed the first project ideas: When speaking about the negative effects of the media (elements 12, 5 and 6) and the lack of knowledge about each other's backgrounds and stories, D2 came up with the idea to collect the stories of D4, D1, D5 and other dialogue participants and to publish them in a booklet that people could buy at the post office. (Researcher journal, CDD session 3, 30 April 2011).

This idea changed over the course of the dialogical inquiry through the contributions of other participants. Participants felt that it would not be workable to collect the stories and write them up for a publication. During the following sessions they changed the idea considerably:

> […] The group sees little traction for this project and does not know how to approach it. D2 suggested it originally and she is not here. D4 says: “'Australian people are afraid to share their history. Overseas people are not. This is a difficult project because we cannot get mainstream Australians involved easily.”(Researcher journal, CDD session 18, 29 October 2011).

While the story group idea itself was abandoned, the suggestion to collect and share stories was connected to the idea to expand the dialogue. The idea of sharing textual information with others who had not participated in the dialogue found its way into a third action plan. During a meeting halfway through the dialogical inquiry, I had mentioned that I had talked about my dialogical research to a colleague working at Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ).[24] This led to the following exchange:

> […] Out of this idea spun a project of turning the CDD documents into a report to be shared with government with the CDD Group as the acknowledged author. I suggested that it was necessary to check the documents, ensure that there were no names in there and to edit them for any stories the group did not want to share. The group thought this was a prudent course and we recorded the project idea. (Researcher journal, CDD session 12, 13 August 2011).

Finally this idea developed into the action plan of sharing the information of the CDD dialogue process with community and government to expand the dialogue (CDD project planning document, 29 November 2011). The result was an eighteen page report which included both *problematiques* presented in Chapter Five of this thesis and the textual clarifications of the elements in the maps. It was shared with MAQ, Multicultural Development Association, Brisbane City Council and Mercy Community Services - The Romero Centre; four important organisations working in the multicultural sector in the greater Brisbane area. The inquiry participants shared this report with people in their peer networks and handed it out at community events and meetings. One peer network participant having read the report stated the following:

> Until I read the report I did not have an idea how the group was providing a map for how a whole lot of groups, anybody who is willing to listen and pick up the agenda make some progress in these things. I think what I have learned through my connection with D5 and through reading the report is how incredibly powerful it is to actually have basically ordinary people working together and working things through in a careful and systematic and ongoing way. […] (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

The examples above have demonstrated how collective ideas can develop from suggestions of a small number of dialogue participants and can then become more stable emergents over the course of a number of meetings. During this process the ideas can change and merge with other ideas until they translate outside the dialogue group as new social structure created by the group. This is not a linear process in which ideas are simply refined but remain unchanged in their core as the data in this section has shown. The action plans resulted from the fusion of horizons of different participants and underwent a

[24] At the time this was the State Government department tasked with progressing positive multicultural relationships in Queensland.

variety of permutations before the group decided to commit to an action plan. In the next section an action which could not be implemented will be presented.

6.1.3 Multicultural advisory committee for schools

Not all of the project ideas were implemented by the group. One idea that was discussed early on and seemed to produce a lot of enthusiasm was not implemented at all. In the following I present the originating conversations and ideas about this project. During the vision-mapping process D7 mentioned her interest in assisting young people to increase their cultural fluency and to develop better relationships with young people from different cultural backgrounds:

> Our little children have got to learn from how the adults treat each other and respect each other. That's where respect comes from. From small level down here to where they are coming up to teenagers, adults and parents. And grandparents at the end of the day. Umm. I think, yeah, it's gonna start. And it is gonna have to start with somebody. […] (D7, CDD interview, 16 April 2011).

At a later meeting the idea to work with schools was picked up by D9 who contributed the following suggestion:

> The other things that need to be done is the schools. The schools that offer English tuition need that information, because my flatmate, I sometimes tell her that an event is on. She asked me how I know and I tell her that I speak with the refugees. I have friends of all backgrounds. They inform me. At schools they are not informed. Tell them to spread information at schools. (D9, CDD focus group 2, 16 July 2011).

During the dialogical inquiry the group developed this idea into a goal for better intercultural connection, expressed in the following vision-mapping statement:

> This can be done through an advisory committee. It can be good for young people to see us sitting in unity. This can help with activities and prevent fighting. They see us united and this can help them. It's all about getting them not to use their fists. That also shows the children that we are there to help them and not sit there and pass judgment. It is important to build stronger connections between young people in school with their elders in the community. We need to find out whose job it is to build these connections. In many high schools there are no parent committees, and if there are committees there are only white Anglo-Australian people on the committees. (CDD vision-mapping document, 15 October 2011).

The group then further refined the vision statement into an action plan to form a culturally diverse advisory committee to work with schools on conflicts in schools (CDD project planning document, 29 November 2011). At the end of the dialogical inquiry the group still discussed whom to contact and how to start this advisory committee. D7 explained that she had a relative in the education department in Queensland. D12, who had some strong views about respectful education of young people, was enthusiastic to start the project (Researcher journal, CDD session 20, 21 January 2012).

However, the project did not progress any further from that point. D7, who was instrumental in sparking the idea in the first place and who had promised to contact the education department suffered from a serious medical condition. She had to have treatment and was unwell for nearly six months in 2012. As a result of this condition she did not follow up on the project. None of the other participants progressed the idea.

This suggests, that even though action ideas can develop out of collective conversation and can be agreed upon by a group, they are nevertheless to some degree tied to the individual areas of social and political influence of group members. In this example D7 was essential to progressing the action idea and she simply could not do so. Even though D12 and other group members were still committed to the project they lacked any direct connections to or inroads with the education department or with specific schools. I recall that at a number of meetings they asked about the project, but D7 was unable to attend and no progress was made.

This example provides an interesting counterpoint to common peacebuilding and social change theories of action. Harold Saunders (2001, p. 139), for example, lists the following conditions for successful implementation of action plans derived from intergroup dialogue the following: ripeness of situation for launching the first steps of the scenario; people and groups identified in the action plan are ready and able to implement it; preparatory steps for implementation have been taken. While Saunders points out that the group needs to discuss if they have the ability to implement or to persuade the people necessary for implementation, an important gap remains in terms of what happens between decision to implement an action plan and actual implementation. It is often presumed that collective decisions will be implemented by the group, as long as it is committed to doing so. However, as this example shows, the capacity to implement an action plan is often tied to individual group members and external circumstances may disrupt the implementation of an idea which receives a lot of support from the group. In this instance, no member other than D7 was capable to start the implementation process. I argue, that it is important to consider that even well-discussed ideas in collective dialogue and decision-making processes may not lead to planned outcomes and generative social change. Here an uncontrollable external factor, D7's illness, prevented the group from making progress towards their stated goal. The data from this study indicates that social change through dialogue is not a linear process. The previous examples have shown that it matters who attends a dialogue process and what their areas of influence are to make social change happen. In the action project example discussed above, D4, D7 and D12 all

had significant contacts within their communities and with service providers to implement the idea to bring more elders to diverse cultural events. In the last example, only D7 had the necessary contacts for the group to progress, and her illness prevented her from making use of them.

6.1.4 Discussion of outward emergence phenomena

The previous sections have discussed three individual action ideas that the dialogical inquiry group developed and have traced the ideas from their inception to their implementation or termination. They have shown that all three action ideas were originally proposals by one dialogue participant, which were then discussed, added to and transformed through collective conversation in the dialogue. All three ideas were committed to some form of social structure by writing them into the project planning document. With regards to the implementation of the ideas it became obvious that the ideas were mostly implemented by particular members of the inquiry group and that this implementation depended on the areas of social influence of these dialogue participants. Not all members of the inquiry participated in the implementation of each idea, although all participants who regularly came to meetings discussed and commented on these ideas and their implementation.

Even though there was strong commitment towards the idea of forming a school advisory group, this idea was not implemented because D7, a key participant for this project, was unable to start the implementation process because of her illness. This leads to a critique of simplified theories of change of peacebuilding and dialogue projects. Theories of change are statements about how an intervention hopes to foster change to produce intended outcomes and impacts (Schirch 2013, p. 165). While authors like Lisa Schirch recognise that changes rarely happen in a ‘cause-and-effect-pattern’ (2013, p. 167) she nonetheless recommends a simplified theory of change formula in which factors that are driving or mitigating violence are manipulated through planned activities to ‘achieve impacts to reduce violence, foster perceptions of justice or strengthen peaceful relationships between groups’ (2013, p. 167). I argue that too often it is overlooked that these activities are tied to the peer network influence of the decision-makers or implementation team and too little research is conducted on how these pathways of influence work. In other words, simplified social change theories assume that collective ideas will be implemented without understanding the importance of individual agent networks in the system. Implementation is tied to these networks and if external or internal events change them then this can have an impact on the implementation of the idea. In

practice, this is a question about the logic of program design and the use of program design tools like logical or results frameworks which logically tie the achievement of a project goal or objective to the implementation of specific activities based on assumptions made by the program designers (Church & Rogers 2006, p. 35). In my experience with program design and implementation, often there is little assessment of the social networks that are necessary to implement these activities.

The following sections address the relationship of dialogical inquiry and peer networks. Six people who had been nominated by members of the inquiry group were interviewed about their knowledge of the dialogue content and their experiences of its impacts. In addition to these questions, they were asked about their own influence on the dialogical inquiry. The aim of the section is to investigate the relationship between micro-system and meso-systems and to examine which ideas and changes emerge outwards from the dialogue group and how they impact in the meso-systems.

6.2 Experiences of peer network participants with regards to barriers between communities

To triangulate the data created in the dialogical inquiry the peer network participants were asked about their perceptions of problems within and across Brisbane communities. All peer network participants confirmed that there were no overt violent conflicts between different cultural communities in Brisbane. However, five out of six peer network participants emphasised the lack of connections between communities that was highlighted by the dialogical inquiry group:

> Brisbane does not have the kind of radical extreme cultural divide and interracial tensions that are definitely present in other societies and cities that I am aware of. [...] There are definitely tensions. The biggest issue is actually the lack of interaction between cultural groups. [...] People not knowing how to make an approach. People not knowing whom to talk to. People being afraid of rejection. In my observation in Anglo-Australian culture there is a habit or norm that we tend to talk only when there is a functional reason to do so, not a social or relationship reason to do so. (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

> The problem is parallel communities. Each group interacts within itself but there is very little interaction horizontally among the communities.[...] The other problem is that within the groups, within the communities, the interaction is also hierarchical. It has residual factors from where people have come from. (P2, peer network interview, 25 May 2012).

P1 and P2, both experienced community workers, confirmed the problems identified by the dialogical inquiry group and outlined in Chapter Five (5.2.1). Both lament a lack of interaction between communities and P1 points out a fear of embarrassment and rejection. P3, also an experienced community development professional and a member of the

Liberian community, confirmed that barriers between communities exist. Moreover, he pointed out, that sometimes these barriers can arise from unresolved issues related to the migration experience, similar to the problems of trauma identified by the dialogical inquiry group. He stated the following:

> There are barriers that do exist in communities. Speaking of the broader multicultural community also, there are barriers that also prevent the active participation of minority groups. The barriers can be unintentional. [...] For the Liberian community, for example, they are made up of so many different ethnic groups and they all come with past problems, issues that are unresolved. [...] For a short while people tend to disregard these things. But as settlement progresses and the community becomes more and more settled, you see some of these old challenges surface. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

It is interesting to note that P3 is of the view that often this downward causation in the form of historical narratives is less challenging in the early periods of settlement but that old traumas and grievances break out when communities become more settled. This points to the importance of post-settlement counselling and assistance for opportunities for social healing so that people experiencing these traumas can process them better. P3 then goes on to address barriers created by other communities and Australian society as a macro-system:

> There are also barriers that impact on all of them regardless of what particular ethnic group you are from. Because you have all come as a new arrival to the country. You are all painted with the same brush and viewed the same way that you are all refugees. If somebody has got a negative approach towards refugees that negative approach impacts everyone of you, not any particular community. [...] These generalisations impact and impede the progress on all who are doing their best to try to make ends meet in the community. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

The negative view of refugees corresponds to the barrier of racism/red-neckism which impacts on intercommunal relations and interaction as identified by the dialogical inquiry group (5.4.1). Further P4 commented on a lack of acceptance of other world views and cultural norms:

> I do see a sort of barrier between different cultures. It is an initial human response to fear what they do not initially understand. For you to have such diverse cultures within a single state, it is almost inevitable there to be barriers between different cultures. [...] I would like there to be a cultural acceptance and I think this is where the problem lies. (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012).

For P4 the major issue that initially made it difficult to integrate into Australian culture was the ‘language barrier’ (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012), which was also identified as a core barrier by the dialogical inquiry group (5.2.1). P4 was of the view that the cultural barriers are denied by the majority of white settler Australian society:

> I think because of media portrayals Australia has some sort of denial, self-denial, within itself. It does not want to acknowledge that there is a cultural barrier. [...] It cannot be

> as multicultural and culturally diverse if it does not address this barrier first. (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012).

P4 is touching upon the deep-rooted fear of otherness prevalent in Australian white settler society that was mentioned throughout this thesis. P5, who is a school administrator, provided a more nuanced view of the cultural barriers and the importance of time in the settlement process:

> That's [barriers between communities] exactly right for the generation that comes. Once children - because I have that ability to see that within the school - I can see that the children will actually make friends within their class group and within cultures and it means nothing. So in the classroom environment it is perfectly fine. [...] But it is very difficult for parents to move in and out of these friendship circles. [...] The older generations have still not integrated but the subsequent ones - we have students who are coming to our school i now who are mixed Vietnamese-English who [the parents] have known each other through school and they are the children of them. It is time. Time is a big factor. (P5, peer network interview, 5 October 2012).

P6, a youth worker, acknowledged that he heard stories of intercultural conflict in the media but had not come across any intercultural conflict in his work. He worked with individual clients so intergroup tensions were not a problem occurring in his experience (P6, peer network interview, 23 November 2012).

With the exception of P6, the peer network interviews confirmed the barriers and issues that the dialogical inquiry group identified. There exists a clear resonance between the results of the dialogical action inquiry and the views of people in the peer networks of participants. The fact, that most of the peer network participants were also social workers and professionals familiar with the settlement service sector in Brisbane provided further validation of the results of the inquiry presented in section 5.2 of the previous chapter. In the next section the impact of the dialogical inquiry on the peer network participants will be presented. This part captures the outward emergence of ideas, frames and action plans into the peer networks of participants.

6.3 Insights from peer network participants about outward emergence from the dialogical inquiry

Peer network participants were asked which information, ideas or action plans they had heard about from their inquiry group contacts. Most peer network participants found it hard to differentiate which information was directly related to the dialogical inquiry and which information was part of other discussions with the inquiry participants. Given that all but one peer network participant had a particular interest in enhancing intercultural connections, it is not surprising that they do not remember exactly which information was related to the dialogue process and which information was related to other discussions.

Even when questioned directly and prompted with statement from the CDD maps and the action plan document, none of the peer network participants was able to name specific ideas raised during the dialogical inquiry. This was surprising for the researcher who had anticipated that it would be possible to triangulate ideas developed in the dialogue by finding similar phrases or terminology in the peer network interview data. The only direct references that peer network participants made to inquiry content were that they had heard that the group talked about barriers between different cultural communities and how to enhance connections. P1 mentioned D5 talking about issues with regards to the Stolen Generations and connections between Aboriginal elders and migrant and refugee communities (see section 5.2.1 in Chapter Five). One explanation for this lack of recognition of ideas could be that many of the issues discussed were widely held and commonly experienced problems and views. Given that most of the peer network participants were community development workers, it might have been difficult for them to differentiate what was new and what was already known.

While it was not possible to triangulate specific ideas or action plans, peer network participants talked about change phenomena which were also identified by the dialogue participants themselves. These included the transformation of relationship towards friendship and respect based on the exchange of personal stories (see section 5.3.1 in Chapter Five):

> I have experienced the core group as a very cohesive group. People work together very well. Perhaps they have known each other for some time. They are comfortable and are able to talk to each other. (P2, peer network interview, 25 May 2012).

P4 mentioned the personal transformation and increase in confidence among dialogue participants (see section 5.3.4 in Chapter Five):

> There is that difference now with D6. She is more willing to voice out. [...] We have this third friend [name removed]. When they engage it is like seeing an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. Every time they converse. Not in a destructive way. But every time they try to converse in relation to these ones I know that [name removed] is affected in some way. In a positive way. [...] She [D6] has more conviction in the way she talks. Because before you could sense a level of uncertainty. (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012).

P3 stated his view that D4 and D12 had improved their abilities to articulate and analyse complex problems and issues within communities (see section 5.3.3 in Chapter Five):

> The work you did had serious impact. Positively for them, you know. They could identify the issues. And not just identify the issues. It was the first time they could actually name the issue. Articulating the issue is a major thing. You can have barriers. But if you are not able to clearly articulate the issue then you cannot address it. Through the

> dialogue they were actually able to articulate some of the issues. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

The peer network interviews confirmed the positive experience that the inquiry group members derived from participation in the inquiry:

> D2 really looked forward to going to the meetings. I know it is important to her. (P5, peer network interview, 5 October 2012).

> She [D7] talked about the dialogue and she seemed really energetic. She described it and I could see that it was a process that she really enjoyed. (P6, peer network interview, 23 November 2012).

P4 mentioned the idea discussed by the inquiry group to expand the dialogue and bring larger groups of culturally diverse people together (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012). This relates directly to the action idea mentioned in section 6.1.2 of this chapter.

Only P1 and P5 had read the report that was drafted by the dialogical inquiry group and could refer to it, but even then they did not remember many of the details. P1 could remember that D5 had told him about issues regarding the Stolen Generations that were discussed during the dialogical inquiry (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012) but could not remember any further details. While all peer network participants had heard about the dialogue, they could not recall any specific ideas or action plans.

This could be interpreted as a lack of impact of the dialogical inquiry beyond the immediate participants. On the other hand, all peer network participants reported on some of the more intangible effects of the inquiry. They mentioned the personal transformations, reported on the energy and enthusiasm created by the participation and P3 even described the positive influences of the dialogical inquiry members on other communities. What seemed to have emerged outward are the relationship frames more so than specifically articulated ideas. This observation correlates with the experiences of the dialogue participants themselves who were more focused on their own relationship transformation than on concrete ideas generated during the CDD process. It again strengthens the idea that the more intangible relational changes connected with participation in dialogue are more important than the goals and action plans put together by a dialogue group.

6.4 Influence of peer network participants on the dialogical inquiry

The peer network participants were interviewed on whether they thought that they, or the context in which they knew the inquiry participants had any influence on the dialogical

inquiry and the views and ideas contributed by the inquiry participants. While it again was difficult for peer network participants to clearly articulate specific ideas, frames or views that influenced the dialogical discussion, most of them voiced the view that they had an impact. P2's interview contains a typical example of this:

> I think yes [I had an impact]. And again I just go back through time and space and place. He [D12] probably - when he talks he talks from his own experience. And his experience about the place probably has had an impact on him.[25] (P2, peer network interview, 25 May 2012).

P1 commented on the impact that his professional discussions with D5 (the two of them worked together in local council at the time) may have had on D5s contributions to the dialogue. While he did not think that there were any concrete ideas that were passed on by D5, he mentioned the 'importance of listening to others' as something they had discussed (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012). After I pointed out that the idea of the core barrier of preference of individualist world views over collectivist world views was originally raised by D5, P1 mentioned that this was an issue that he and D5 had discussed extensively:

> That came from some material that I provided him. [...] Definitely. I can even give you the handout that we have got. [...] For us that is a major theme that our work has to deal with in its whole conception with its services. (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

P3 mentioned the influence of his organisation's work in the form of leadership training that his organisation had provided to refugees being settled in Brisbane. D4 and D12 received this training, as stated by P3:

> It shaped their way of thinking about leadership in the community in the context of settlement. Compare and contrast that with the tradition of leading their community group back in the refugee camp. Because of a lot of things that community leaders do in a refugee camp may not be applicable here, you know. Community leaders could take bribes, for example. [...] And in Australia it is a crime. [...] Our rule is how we raise awareness of these things. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

P4 talked about having taken a university subject on Indigenous history together with D6. They frequently engaged in discussions about cross-cultural relations. He thought that these discussions had an impact on D6's 'moral compass' (P4, peer network interview, 3 October 2012). Another point that was important to P4 was perceived denial of cross-cultural barriers and problems in Australian mainstream society. He expressed that this was something he talked to D6 about.

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[25] D12 was a client of the refugee settlement and advocacy centre managed by P2. The place referred to this centre.

P6 recognised a ‘community spirit’ that he shared with D7 and which was the basis of their professional collaboration. While he did not think that this directly influenced the dialogical inquiry he thought that it was a deep commitment shared by both of them and that D7 would have exhibited this during her participation in the inquiry process (P6, peer network interview, 23 November 2012).

The lack of detail with regards to influence into the dialogue that appears through all peer network interviews can be interpreted in different ways. It may simply be due to the fact that the influence was limited, and that dialogue participants did not necessarily discuss ideas and emergents created with the peer network participants that were interviewed. This would mean that the micro-system of the dialogical inquiry was separated from the meso-systems of peer network participants. However, even participants like P6, who did not know much at all about the dialogical inquiry or did not work much cross-culturally, thought that their discussions with the dialogue participants did influence the participant’s views. An explanation for this could be a simple need to have their contributions to important topics acknowledged, or the illusion that discussions about important topics like community or multiculturalism have an impact on all participants involved and help to shape their views.

A different interpretation is possible when the data is viewed through the lens of the emergence paradigm. Similar to the outward emergence of pro-social frames of interaction and friendly relationships, what permeated the boundary between the meso-systems of peer network and the micro-system of the inquiry group were not necessarily fully formed ideas but rather stable emergents (level D in the conceptual framework). According to Sawyer’s theory (2005, p. 214) stable emergents of small groups include shared, collective history, group learning, group development, peer culture, and collective memory. The ‘community spirit’ mentioned by P6, as well as the discussions between P4 and D6 which shaped D6’s ‘moral compass’ fit into this definition. While Sawyer argues that a higher level of social structure causes greater downward causation, and therefore influence on the other agents who take part in the interaction, he recognises that constraint (and therefore influence) is exerted at any level of emergent arising from the interaction. More research into these not fully articulated emergents would help to better understand their role and how their downward causation can be harnessed to assist in effective group decision-making for social change.

6.5 Experiences of changes in the communities of dialogue participants

When asked about changes in the communities of dialogue participants and whether the dialogue process had any positive impact, the peer network participants again thought that dialogue participants had positively impacted, but found it hard to articulate specifics. The statements of peer network participants expressed that some members of the dialogue group had become leaders and peace builders in their communities. One peer network participant explained how she had become part of the outward emergence effect of the dialogical inquiry. A number of the peer network participants expressed doubt as to the larger impact of the dialogical inquiry.

6.5.1 Dialogue participants take leadership and mediator roles in their communities

According to peer network participants, some members of the inquiry group took on leadership roles in their communities during or after participation in the dialogical inquiry. P3 explained that D4 had become such a leader and that his interaction with leaders from other communities became more constructive:

> Particularly D4 has been very open to learning new things. […] And based on his influence in his own community people start to listen to him more and respect him in a position. And that has also helped him to understand the other side better through participating in the dialogue. […] Before the community leaders meeting used to be chaotic, you know. People go there and just say things about other communities that they don't like openly. And community leaders would be angry and they don't want to come back to the meeting. But that was part of the learning process, that was part of the discussion. But those who went through this dialogue, some of the benefit they got from there was how to speak about the issue, how to articulate the issue and remain respectful to others. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

He then elaborated on a conflict that had broken out in D4's and D10's Rohingyan community of Queensland:

> I also know that especially for the Rohingyan community it helped them to develop respect for each other. When the conflict started it was just [unintelligible] conflict. Then you sit with them and they started to explain to you that the root of the conflict is not in Australia. It is back in the refugee camp, where they lived. And from experience and talking to some of the leaders, one group was really afraid of the way in which the other group is - you know - leading the community. And this group was leading the community in a very negative way. […] You had some real tension in the community. And people started really to demonise each other and go against each other and it resulted in a fistfight. But […] those who had the skills from the dialogue started saying 'look, I got to be more professional, I got to be more respectful'. Even if we disagree on ideas, I got to make sure we got the facts right. That helped them to present their story and seek support. And develop plans on how to address the issues. That has been the most helpful part. (P3, peer network interview, 31 May 2012).

According to P3, D4 played a major part in mediating this conflict. He never discussed this community conflict with the dialogue group or the researcher. The

researcher only learned about it during the interview with P3. As pointed out above (see section 6.1.1.1 in this Chapter) D4 regularly 'reported' back to his community after attending an inquiry group meeting. Given that many of these meetings occurred straight after the inquiry group meetings it is possible that D4 quite literally 'carried' the ephemeral and stable emergents of dialogical engagement, listening and respectful communication into his community meetings. This is another example of how ephemeral and stable emergents can exhibit constraint on other interactions (here the interactions of D4 with others in his meso-system of Rohingya community group meeting) and how the dialogical inquiry positively influenced the macro-system of the Rohingyan community without this ever having been articulated as a goal or action plan.

Another example of how inquiry participants 'carried' these emergents was hinted at by P1 with regards to the status of D7 and D6 in their communities:

> The fact is that D7 has conversations about it [the dialogue] with people. And she has a voice because she is an Aboriginal Elder. She has had an impact for sure. She talked about things at the Togolese Independence Day celebration. [...] I also see that D6 will take it into her work. She is a person who has influence within her ethnic community but also in her professional work. (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

The impact described by P1 was within her Aboriginal community, but also across cultural communities as she was often invited by other cultural communities to perform Welcome to Country ceremonies and to speak about the history of First Nations Australians. Two years after the dialogical inquiry had finished D7 became the first Aboriginal elder to become an honorary member of the Queensland African Communities Council (QACC). Since then she has organised and assisted with a number of fundraising and other events in partnership with QACC.

6.5.2 Dialogical influence spreads through peer networks of participants into other exo- and macro-systems

P5, the daughter of D2, described an example of how she herself became part of the influence pathway spreading ideas from the dialogical inquiry group. At one of the group's meetings in 2012 the group had received a booklet with poetry from Afghan and Iranian refugees that was developed by a local settlement service and advocacy centre.[26] D2 discussed the poetry with her daughter, P5, and passed on the booklet. P5, a school administrator, then placed the booklet in the waiting room of the school where she worked. She commented on the impact of the dialogical inquiry:

[26] It was given to group members by P2 who was the manager of this centre.

> I think it is extending itself into the broader community. It certainly has with me. And by putting that literature into the waiting room I am extending it out as well. [...] I took it to school and I put it into the school's waiting room because that's where everybody waits for their enrolment interviews. And people pick it up because it is the only book. I actually am very careful. I don't have lots of brochures there.[...] But this one people picked up and were reading. I think that is a really good thing. [...] And that would not have happened were it not for your group and that passing through from there. While it is actually not your work, it has come through it. (P5, peer network interview, 5 October 2012).

This reflection shows how peer network participants themselves became extensions of the dialogical inquiry and how the stable emergent of appreciating and acknowledging people's stories of journey to Australia (which was also the content of the booklet) impacted on the exo-system of the school community. It also in an indirect way progressed the failed action plan of better educating young people about diversity in schools. In systemic thinking, these unintended consequences and non-linear effects are typical signs of a complex system. System effects are mediated through a variety of nodes within the network of the system and this can create surprising and unintended macro-patterns.

6.5.3 Doubts about macro-system impact of dialogical inquiry

Previously it was argued that peer network participants acknowledged and confirmed some of the positive changes in the meso- and macro-systems of communities. However, they also cast some doubts about the ability of the inquiry group members to initiate larger systemic changes.

When asked if he thought whether the dialogue had helped the communities in Brisbane, P2 wondered if the inquiry participants were well connected enough to make changes in society at large:

> I am not sure about their impact on the larger community and I am not sure about the connectedness of each individual in the group. As a unit I think it is operating very nicely but that larger impact I am not sure about. I am not sure about how it is going to eventuate. (P2, peer network interview, 25 May 2012).

P1 thought that some of the macro-system changes were easier to initiate for the inquiry group if they were well supported and if they continued their ongoing connections with each other. He also reflected on the report that the inquiry group had created. While he felt it was a good report and a map for other communities he voiced doubts with regards to its impact.

> I'll be interested to see how they [the inquiry group] are going to make all this happen. How is this information going to get owned by other groups without having gone through that same process. Because as I said, what happened was that people matured through the process. How do you put a mature result on people who have not necessarily gone through that same process themselves? [...] My immediate reaction is

> to say I don't think there is much of a shortcut. I suspect that the way to do it is actually group by group. (P1, peer network interview, 3 March 2012).

P1 added that he was not sure if other people understood the "journey" of the dialogue group since they had not experienced this journey themselves. The metaphor of the journey mentioned by P1 relates to the conditions for effective decision-making and social change through dialogue that Innes and Booher have researched. They suggest the necessity of face-to-face dialogue approaching the ideal speech conditions prescribed by Jürgen Habermas (Innes & Booher 2010, p. 35). Transformation through dialogue is best achieved during a face-to-face encounter, which touches participants personally and allows for immediate and authentic reactions to each other's stories. It is unlikely that this transformation would have been achieved without the sustained discussion over the nine months inquiry period.

P1's doubt that the report alone can help other groups or communities gain similar insights or changes in relationship is well founded. It highlights the difficulty of recording dialogic moments and of capturing the more ephemeral effects of dialogue in textual form. With regards to the use of dialogue for social change, P1's statement discourages the idea of rolling out large-scale dialogue programs and creates doubt about the value of publishing results on websites or in reports as a means to support this social change. A different approach would be for members of dialogue groups to transfer the relational changes into their peer networks and potentially into other dialogue groups that they participate in. This approach would require a series of dialogic encounters in which initial participants engage with other people from their meso- and exo-systems and replicate the dialogical journey they have undertaken. Most likely, this would mean a resource intensive and slow process of social change. On the other hand, such an approach would make use of opportunities for creating dialogic moments to change the future behaviour of participants through the transmission of pro-social norms. Because each new dialogic encounter is different from the last the way in which such social changes manifest is more evolutionary than planned (Bar-Yam 2004, p. 206; Loode 2011, p. 75).

With regards to strong and easily identifiable examples of generative social change caused by the dialogue group on communities at large or on Australian society as a whole, peer network participants expressed that they thought the dialogical inquiry would be helpful for establishing better community relations, however their remarks were so general and unspecific that they seemed more like hopes than actual experience. This section has discussed the potential for changes to emerge over time through the committed work of the dialogical inquiry participants. It is acknowledged that the results are not conclusive

and could not support strong and clearly identifiable influences. This was to be expected in light of the modest scope of this dialogical action inquiry and in light of the insights from systems theory about non-linear effects and systemic changes over time.

6.6 Conclusion

This analysis of data has provided for a number of themes to emerge. Firstly, it has provided insight into the idea generation process within a dialogical inquiry group. Ideas emerge through collective conversation and form ephemeral and stable emergents over time. Personal history of participants creates downward causation with regards to the ideas and views which people contribute to the dialogue. Action ideas are not solely generated by individual participants. After an idea is contributed it sparks further ideas from other participants, is transformed through the conversation, and sometimes other elements are added or left out. What was decided upon in the deliberative phase of the dialogical inquiry was not the idea of an individual anymore, but the idea of the group which has gained ownership to carry it out. The experiences of the inquiry participants themselves have confirmed the value of deep listening as part of this process and support Sawyer's research into *problem-finding* and *problem-solving* group processes. More creative and innovative ideas are generated when a group process allows for problem-finding and not just problem-solving.

At the same time, implementation of ideas was tied to the personal social and political influence of the people who decided to work on an action idea. It is shortsighted to assume that ideas, once the group has committed to them and once they are written up with measurable, specific and realistic goals, will automatically be implemented. As the experience of the inquiry group has shown, the personal peer networks of participants and their own pathways of influence played a major role and resulted in the abandonment of an idea when the person it was relying on was unable to progress it further. Another example of this was the distribution of the refugee poetry booklet through the peer network of a dialogue participant into the exo-system of the school. More research is needed to further investigate these network impacts, but the thesis has shown that a flexible long-term action research inquiry like the one performed, can draw attention to such unintended consequences and non-linear system effects.

Secondly interpretation of the data has produced a surprising result in showing that not necessarily fully formed ideas and action plans create social change in meso- and macro-systems, but that lower level emergents, like changed relationships and frames of

friendship, can have a stronger impact on peer networks than the action ideas themselves. The peer network participants in this study were unable to recall precise ideas generated by the dialogical inquiry group, even though the group committed them to paper and each group member had a copy of this action plan. What emerged out of the micro-system of the dialogue were frames of friendship between participants, which they replicated at a public community event with other people from their meso-, exo- and macro-systems. In addition to this, the increase in confidence when encountering people from other cultural backgrounds, and the increased ability to respectfully and clearly articulate community problems, were more stable emergents created during the inquiry which emerged into the peer networks. The peer network participants acknowledged these as positive aspects of the dialogical inquiry and two dialogue participants were even lauded for having taken on the role of peacebuilders in their communities.

Another insight gained from the data collected from peer network participants was a resonance test of the insights generated within the dialogue group. According to Burns, systemic action research requires resonance testing of insights by tapping into other parts of the social system that is being researched to collect a diversity of perspectives to triangulate the data (2007, p. 158). Peer network participants have confirmed the assessment of a lack of connections and a lack of dialogue between different cultural communities in Brisbane. They have also agreed that a dialogical encounter is a way to deal with this lack of connection and have mentioned the positive impacts of individual members of the dialogue group within their peer networks and within their communities.

It has to be pointed out that the macro-system impact of the dialogical inquiry was small. In general, intercultural relationships between major cultural groups in the greater Brisbane area have not necessarily been improved and it is safe to say that only a small number of people were even aware of the dialogical inquiry and the research project. While significant follow-on projects were sparked from the research and the relationships between participants are ongoing, P1 has expressed it correctly when he doubted a strong macro-system impact because the relational changes experienced by the inquiry group required participation in this dialogue. Just hearing about it, even directly from participants, does not fully articulate the ideas and emergents generated by the collective conversation. This is in line with suggestions from other dialogue and planning researchers and facilitators who emphasise the importance of face-to-face dialogue (Innes & Booher 2010, p. 35).

Because of time and resource constraints research with peer network participants was not conducted as deeply as the research with the dialogical inquiry group. Only six peer network participants were interviewed and they did not represent each inquiry group member. This part of the research was carried out over a period of approximately twelve months after weekly or fortnightly inquiry group meetings had finished. While I recognise that this could be considered a weakness with regards to the validity of the data I believe that it also had advantages. Even though a report had been published by the inquiry group with the help of the researcher, the peer network participants still could not remember any specific details regarding ideas and action plans. This shows the shortcomings of dialogue processes with regards to changes in public policy or specific projects. What has endured were the relational changes which have, in subtle ways, impacted on many other people and relationships. This again is significant and well worth further research in the future. The positive impacts on the participants themselves have been confirmed by their peers. In the next Chapter Seven I am going to discuss the findings presented in this and the previous chapter in a broader context of conflict resolution and peacebuilding interventions.

7. Discussion: insights from a dialogical action research inquiry for development, peacebuilding and social change initiatives

The research underlying this thesis was developed out of a desire to improve relationships between First Nations Australians, white settlers and recent arrivals from refugee and migrant backgrounds. I also aimed to better understand the effects of dialogical encounters on participants and their communities. This chapter discusses insights arrived at from the application of a complex systems framework to the research data collected during the action research inquiry.

A summary of the key findings presented in Chapters Five and Six is discussed in the context of a more general scholarly debate of dialogue processes, social change and peacebuilding interventions. I acknowledge that action research projects often produce findings which are irreversible, cannot be replicated in future studies and which are sometimes difficult to generalise (Gustavsen, Hansson & Qvale 2008, p. 63). However, irreversibility is a fundamental characteristic of complex social systems, and studying its effects can provide valuable insights into systemic patterns and macroscopic effects of systems. Research and practice intervention in complex social systems defy a pre-determined linear methodology since multiple interdependent actions happen at the same time and influence each other and the environment (Burns 2007, p. 156). They create a constant state of flux and even systemic research can only provide small windows showing particular systemic effects and their causes at a particular moment in time. In light of this approach, the discussion in this chapter should not be interpreted as objective and dogmatic theory. It was the result of a unique and non-repeatable social change process and it was interpreted by me based on a conceptual framework which allowed me to make sense of the phenomena I was investigating.

The chapter also discusses six themes and issues which respond to critiques and debates identified in the literature review in Chapter Two. The chapter firstly engages the question of how dialogical action research can contribute to understanding of dialogue and social change. By doing this, it responds to a call from Dessel and Rogge for more (action) research to examine dialogue processes and their impacts (Dessel & Rogge 2008). In this context it engages with the debate about the separation of research and intervention that action researchers attempt to transcend. Next, the chapter aims to more thoroughly define dialogue processes and distinguish them from negotiation and deliberation processes. This responds to the common point of critique that dialogue is a vague and difficult to

capture social process. The discussion highlights that one important criterion of dialogue is the encouragement of dialogic moments. It will argue that the most beneficial social change effects of dialogue are derived from the process and not from potential action plan results or negotiated agreements. This leads to a critique of common peacebuilding, conflict intervention and social change programs that often prioritise the documentation of results and action plans over the non-linear effects of the engagement process. Moreover, the findings provide insights into another issue plaguing peacebuilding and social change interventions: the problem of barriers to participation. It is argued that the phenomenon of downward causation constrains the agency of potential participants and may inhibit them from participating in the dialogue even though they consider it beneficial. While dialogue provides conditions for the emergence of new and generative ideas, in some situations downward causation, focused on a conflictual and destructive attractor in a system is too strong for individuals and hinders them from participating. Lastly, the theoretical implications of a systemic paradigm are applied to the situation in Australia with regards to attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers and towards reconciliation with First Nations Australia. In this context the Attractor Landscape Model, presented in the conceptual framework in Chapter Three, is revisited and conclusions are drawn about why it is so difficult to change attitudes of paranoid nationalism and to progress meaningful reconciliation and decolonisation.

7.1 Contributions of dialogical action research to the understanding of dialogue and social change

In their 2006 article on intergroup dialogue and social change, Dessel and Rogge (2006, p. 312) stated that community-based dialogue research was still at an early stage but clearly warranted further study in both academic and community settings. They also noted that collecting data in community-based settings is often difficult and met with resistance from both practitioners and participants (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 313). My study aimed to answer this call for more research in a modest way and introduced an innovative approach to capturing knowledge created during dialogue processes as part of an action research inquiry. It provided insights, both into the effects of intergroup dialogue on individual participants and their group, as well as into the effects of dialogue processes on the meso-systems and communities of dialogue participants. Dessel and Rogge would call this the evaluation of the outcome of the dialogue. They recommend mixed-methods research and the use of randomised control trials to measure outcomes and effects of dialogue. Theirs is a positivist approach to research which separates research from

intervention and views the researcher as an independent and neutral observer who can record and document evidence and data which constitute an objective truth about the dialogue and its impacts. This is quite a different approach from the dialogical action inquiry used in this study and contradicts a number of systemic principles and views.

Gerald Midgley (2000, p. 113) argues that even research carried out solely through observation constitutes some kind of intervention and defines intervention as 'purposeful action by a human agent to create change'. He suggests that the idea of neutral observation is not congruent with a process ontology based on systems thinking because a systems view of social reality regards everything as interconnected and therefore precludes the possibility of a truly independent observer (Midgley 2000, p. 123). Even basic or pure research requires researchers to make decisions about the purpose of the research, the boundaries of the systems to be researched and the theories used to analyse data. Therefore there can be no knowledge generation through observation without the existence of a knowledge generating system (Midgley 2000, p. 125):

> Scientific observation is not just any observation, but a moment in which the situation is constructed to facilitate the observation under controlled conditions. There are two levels at which this kind of observation is dependent on the involvement of agents within knowledge generating systems: first, in establishing the goals and parameters of the observation; and second, in actually undertaking the observation.

The observations which researchers report are dependent on the interpretations of the same researchers and the language systems used by them to communicate their interpretations. These are again based on value decisions about which epistemologies to follow and how to communicate the data. I agree with Midgley (2000, p. 128) that even supposedly neutral observation constitutes an engagement with the systems under observation and therefore an intervention, which is undertaken purposefully by an agent to create change in knowledge or practice. A systems epistemology allows for a pluralism of methodologies and methods to be included in the definition of research and allows for a strong connection between practice, observation, reflection, analysis and theory building, similar to the definition of action research by Reason and Bradbury presented in Chapter Four of this thesis.

As reported in section 5.1 of Chapter Five, participants in this dialogical action inquiry referred to their own experience during the dialogical research inquiry ('like we are talking in this dialogue') as a way of clarifying and defining what they described as a lived experience of respect. The research inquiry did not just collect data about dialogue experiences, it helped participants to create data and knowledge about what dialogical experience felt like to them. In addition, the knowledge created about conditions of

dialogue responded to the practical needs of the inquiry group to increase intercultural community dialogue and to the goals of the doctoral research to capture experiences and effects of dialogue as a combination of practice and research.

The action inquiry created knowledge about the conditions and effects of dialogue and generated action and change (Loode forthcoming). The participants developed an action plan with a number of different projects and then worked together to implement these projects. As presented in Chapter Six, the outcomes were an increase in cross-cultural participation of community elders in each other's events and ceremonies, assistance in fundraising for a series of large public dialogues attended by more than 300 people and the drafting and distribution of a report of the findings of the dialogical inquiry to service providers, state government and other communities (Loode forthcoming).

Participants explained during the focus groups how they developed more confidence to respectfully engage with strangers in cross-cultural encounters, and how they constructively contributed to their own community meetings by having gained skills to articulate community problems, and the ability to facilitate collective planning processes for others. As a researcher, I was able to document these changes and experiences and to draw conclusions about the more general effects of dialogue and how changes can emerge from small groups to larger communities. Since the original inquiry process, the research contributed to and sparked a series of other projects and programs extending far beyond the initial research idea. This shows the beneficial connection between research and action intervention (Loode forthcoming).

The study suggests that a dialogical action research inquiry is highly suitable to research effects of dialogue processes and the link between small-group dialogue and social change. The research in this thesis expands Dessel's and Rogge's suggestion for a research agenda which is mostly focused on positivist methodologies. It is unlikely that randomised control trials would have been able to capture the subtle changes (Burns 2007, p. 155) in the dialogue group, or trace these changes into the peer networks as this study has done. The constitution of the dialogical inquiry group was unique and could not be reproduced in this form. A focus on evaluating and researching the results of this dialogue process would quite possibly have obscured these relational changes because they were more difficult to document and test. A systemic research perspective with purposive snowball sampling for resonance testing, as was utilised in this study, was able to capture these effects.

In spite of this innovative approach the research findings presented in Chapter Six also highlight the limitations of the study and the need for further research. Participants in the peer networks were unable to clearly articulate ideas developed by the dialogue group and while they thought they had input through their connections with dialogue participants, their answers as to how this input worked were vague and inconclusive. The study was only able to reach six peer network participants, although some of them did know more than one particular dialogical inquiry group member. This part of the inquiry network could have been strengthened significantly for more in-depth resonance testing.

Future research in a similar format should engage the peer network participants earlier, possibly during the time that the dialogical inquiry is undertaken. After dialogue participants have created a safe container for learning and have embraced the dialogue process, they are likely to suggest peer network participants and then interviews can be held during and after the dialogical inquiry group meetings. In addition, more people knowledgeable about the meso- and exo-systems of the dialogue participants could be included in the study. In this research project, it was more a coincidence that dialogue participants suggested experienced community development practitioners as peer network research participants, which provided important insights into the effects of the dialogue process on meso- and exo-systems.

In a future research project I would again purposefully include peer network participants suggested by the dialogical inquiry members. However, I would complement this method by conducting additional focus groups or interviews with community development and other professionals familiar with the subject of the inquiry. This creates another entry point into the system and another feedback loop for resonance testing (Burns 2007, pp. 158-9) and therefore further improves the validity of the research data collected.

7.2 Defining dialogue as a process which encourages moments of mutuality

Dessel and Rogge (2008, p. 228) lament a lack of clarity around the dialogue protocol used for intergroup processes. A comparison of research on dialogue processes confirms dialogue methods investigated vary considerably and are often not described in enough detail to compare studies (Dessel & Rogge 2008). The Creative Dialogue & Design/Interactive Management method utilised for this study is an exception here. IM is well documented and researched and software and a facilitation guide (Warfield & Cardenas 1993, 2002) are freely available. IM processes have been reported extensively

in the academic literature and underlying psychological, systems and facilitation theories are clearly articulated (Broome 2006, 2009; Broome & Chen 1992; Broome & Fulbright 1995; Broome & Keever 1989; Broome & Murray 2002; Christakis & Bausch 2006).

In addition to the considerable lack of clarity around dialogue methods utilised in research and practice interventions, the review of the scholarly literature on dialogue processes in section 2.3 of Chapter Two has shown that even in a scholarly sense, dialogue is difficult to define and that there are a variety of different intergroup methods available to practitioners and researchers which are labelled as dialogue. As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter Two, Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas' *Democratic Dialogue Handbook* (2007, p. 1) defines dialogue in the following way:

> […] processes that are open, sustained and flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts. It [dialogue] can be used to achieve consensus or prevent conflict - a complement to, not a replacement for, democratic institutions such as legislatures, political parties and government bodies.

Their focus is on dialogue processes used in post-conflict peacebuilding situations, or as part of international conflict resolution efforts. Lakhdar Brahimi, former advisor to the United National Secretary-General and Special Envoy to Syria, refers to his peace mediation efforts as dialogue processes in the foreword to Pruitt and Thomas' handbook. His ideas of dialogue involve negotiation, mediation and other conflict resolution processes (Pruitt & Thomas 2007, p. xiv). These notions of political dialogues are different from the definitions presented in section 2.4.1 of the literature review, in particular from Bohm's and Buber's ideas of what dialogue constitutes. While Buber and Bohm focused on the creation of collective conversation and the strengthening of human connections, the processes described by Pruitt and Thomas include processes of deliberation and negotiation, often with strong enmities and different levels of power, influence and resources at the negotiation table. Is it useful to draw the line so widely around what processes dialogue encompasses?

Most traditional conflict resolution processes, such as mediation, are focused on achieving some form of negotiated agreement or informed decision-making by the parties involved (Mediator Standards Board 2012, p. 2). They can potentially improve the relationships between participants and even allow them to experience dialogic moments of mutuality with each other, but these are more by-products than expressly stated goals. Christopher Moore (2014, p. 8), a prominent author in the field of mediation, calls mediation an 'extension of the negotiation process'.

The research presented in section 5.4.4 of Chapter Five documented the fleeting dialogic moments that occurred during the dialogical inquiry. These moments were almost always precipitated by storytelling about a personal experience by one or more participants in the inquiry. They did not occur during the more outcome-focused phases of the CDD process, they occurred in the clarification and structuring phases in which participants explained their different views and experiences to each other. These moments were categorically different to negotiation or mediated discussion. They were personal, often exposed the storyteller to considerable vulnerability and were not outcome-focused. They were also often the moments clearly remembered by inquiry participants and referred to later during the inquiry process. As presented in section 2.4.2 of the literature review, Carl Rogers suggested that dialogic moments can have a significant impact on participants. They are the moments when behaviours and views change (Cissna & Anderson 1998, p. 71).

With these findings in mind, I argue that the broad definition from the *Democratic Dialogue Handbook* above is too inclusive and too general to fully grasp the unique and powerful nature of dialogic moments. A dialogue process should aim to encourage the occurrence of such moments by allowing participants to exchange personal experiences and stories.

A similar view is expressed by David Bohm (2004, p. 8), who argued that dialogue processes are not negotiation or diplomatic discussion, since in such processes people are not open to questioning their fundamental assumptions . Bohm goes further than that in his essay *Dialogue - a proposal*. He suggests that dialogue is a conversation between equals and that any controlling authority will 'inhibit the free play of thought' which occurs in true dialogue (Bohm, Factor & Garrett 1991). While Bohm agrees that in the early stages of dialogue facilitation it is necessary to create a safe space, he argues that when a dialogue group has established its own rules and participants have gained experience with dialogue, then this facilitation is no longer necessary (2004, p. 17). He instead suggests that the group chooses the topic under discussion and that no content should be excluded if it is brought up.

Essentially this is an unstructured and flexible form of dialogue, which is maintained by the dialogue group itself and could be considered the other extreme in a spectrum of dialogue processes. The research presented in this thesis has used a more structured method of dialogue facilitation, the CDD/IM process. The linear structure and use of

computer software to input information differs significantly from Bohm's ideas of free form dialogue.

Nevertheless, the findings presented in this thesis have shown that it was possible to generate the conditions for dialogic moments to occur within the structure of the CDD process. What was important was that the facilitation structure created opportunities to share these stories and personal experiences and for participants to clarify and discuss their thoughts and ideas. The CDD process created a container for thoughts and knowledge and the software helped visualise and structure the emergence of collective thought. This suggests that dialogue can occur in more structured and linear situations with guided facilitation. It can occur in problem-solving contexts, as long as the aim of the conversation is to share and explore different views and not necessarily to arrive at a solution or detailed action plan as the outcome of the dialogue. I agree with Bohm that dialogue is not negotiation, unless negotiation is understood as a negotiation of collective meaning and understanding. Rarely will this occur in the dialogue processes mentioned by Brahimi in the *Democratic Dialogue Handbook* (Pruitt & Thomas 2007, p. xiv). On the other hand, the free form dialogue envisioned by Bohm is also the only way to create conditions for dialogic moments.

To convey the insights drawn from this inquiry and to assist with the clarification of the concept of dialogue, I offer the following definition, which emphasises the goal of encouraging dialogic moments while acknowledging that these moments can happen in problem-solving contexts:

> Dialogue is a process of interpersonal interaction in which participants exchange views and explore each other's understanding of a situation or phenomenon. Dialogue encourages the emergence of collective thought and moments of mutuality in which the participants turn to each other and engage in an ethical relationship with each other. These interactions can take place as part of problem-solving or deliberation processes but they occur separately from negotiation and decision-making. Often moments of mutuality are precipitated by the exchange of personal stories from some participants and deep listening by others. Dialogue does not aim to create agreements or action plans but they can be by-products of the process or part of a larger deliberation process.

7.3 The importance of the dialogical journey and not the action plan result

One of the surprising outcomes of the research presented in section 5.3.1 in Chapter Five and section 6.1.1.1 in Chapter Six was that the most significant outward emergence of dialogue ideas and themes was not a particular action idea but the changes in relationship that the dialogue participants experienced. In a number of settings outside the dialogue group, they exhibited welcoming and inclusive attitudes and role-modelled

respectful behaviour in line with their goal to provide ‘a lived experience of respect’. I was surprised that peer network participants reported more about these ephemeral and stable emergents created by the dialogical inquiry group than on specific documented project ideas. These changed frames of interaction, which were confirmed by the dialogue participants when they talked about how their interaction with others across cultural difference had improved, were some of the most significant outcomes of the dialogical inquiry. They were not associated with the end product of the CDD process, the problem- and vision-maps and the written action plan, they were results of the engagement in the dialogue process. This leads to the following conclusion: the dialogic journey was more important for participants and had a stronger influence on the meso- and eco-systems of participants than the focus on documentable and actionable results. The networking and relationship building during the dialogue process created opportunities for non-linear and unpredictable effects. Section 6.5.2 of the previous chapter presented how P5, the daughter of D2, spread the ideas developed in the dialogical inquiry group by placing a booklet with refugee poetry given to D2 during one of the inquiry meetings in the waiting room of her school. This was an unplanned, unforeseeable effect of the dialogical inquiry, which indicates that it is easy to overlook beneficial outcomes of dialogue processes which are not directly tied to documented action plans. Again it highlights the importance of the dialogical journey instead of the action plan outcome. While P5, through her action, helped achieve the goals of the inquiry group her action was not the direct result of an action idea; it was a non-linear effect. In the context of international aid and development, Ramalingam et al. (2008, p. 11) note that individuals are part of families, neighbourhoods and villages, and that actions at one level have impacts on other parts of the social system. Many traditional research and intervention methods tend to overlook the system effects of interconnectedness and feedback and are unable to adapt to and to even notice non-linear systems effects.

Research on dialogue processes often highlights the beneficial effects of participation in dialogue. Common outcomes are increased perspective-taking, sense of commonality regarding other groups, capacity to view differences as compatible with democracy and increased political involvement regarding constructive multiculturalism (Dessel & Rogge 2008, p. 224). In community settings outcomes of dialogue projects include stereotype reduction, increased understanding and empathy, recognition of importance and impact of ethnicity on individual identity and group interactions, increased awareness about structural power relations and more nuanced thinking about diversity and multiculturalism (Dessel & Rogge 2008, pp. 225-6). Many of these dialogue outcomes were confirmed in

this study, as reported in Chapters Five and Six. Participants built stronger relationships with each other, learned about each other's backgrounds, reduced stereotypes and developed a much more nuanced understanding of multiculturalism. They showed empathy for each other and reported on personal growth and change in their communication styles within and outside the dialogue group.

In addition to these effects the participants also reported on the development of collective thinking and ideas, outcomes that are absent from the meta-study undertaken by Dessel and Rogge. In line with the ideas of theorists such as David Bohm and Hans-Georg Gadamer, this study has presented evidence that a fusion of horizons took place during the dialogical encounters in that the participants have clearly indicated that the ideas developed were not individual ideas but that they were developed through collective conversation (see section 6.1.1.2 in Chapter Six). This collective conversation was tied to the dialogue process and highlights again the importance of process over outcome. The dialogical inquiry group engaged in a problem-finding activity in which they defined the problem- and vision-questions used for the CDD process. I supported this by encouraging them to gain a thorough understanding first before they started to define action plans and project ideas. As was reported in section 5.3.3 of Chapter Five and section 6.5.1 in Chapter Six, peer network participants highlighted the thorough understanding that the inquiry group members developed. This again confirms the importance of process over outcome. To engage in creative problem-finding activities participants need to be given opportunity to define their own problem or goal questions and to make decisions about the aims of the dialogue or inquiry. This is possible in a deliberative and analytic process like CDD if the facilitators take the time to engage participants in dialogue about the dialogue process and goal before launching into the detail.

Burns has also voiced concerns about dialogical inquiry facilitation that is too structured or methodic as it is against the ethos of systemic action research and may alienate participants who are more interested in story sharing and discussion (Burns 2007, p. 157). While he is cautious of some soft systems facilitation methods that use an overly rigid structure and advocates a more flexible way of facilitating action research dialogues, the findings presented in Chapter Five show that the participants in this inquiry process greatly appreciated the structure provided by the CDD facilitation method and even the linearity of parts of the inquiry. For me the key difference is that the CDD process provided a linear and structured framework, and my facilitation in the room provided flexible safe spaces which gave participants the opportunities to tell their stories and share their

experiences. While on paper the CDD/IM process may look outcome focused and linear, it provides enough flexibility for a facilitator to encourage dialogical encounters, relationship-building and dialogic moments while still helping participants understand where they are in the flow of discussion.

7.4 The importance of relationship-building in peacebuilding and development programs

Another implication of the tendency of complex social systems to produce non-linear effects through self-organisation is that it is difficult or impossible to predict outcomes and accomplish precisely defined goals of a peacebuilding and social change project. Ramalingam and colleagues argue that aid organisations which are in a position of control to determine programs and projects 'should not define more than is absolutely necessary to launch a particular initiative, and that the role of grand designer should be avoided in favour of the role of facilitation, orchestration and creating the enabling environment that allows the system to find its own form' (2008, p. 23). They highlight the importance of local knowledge and local connections of actors in the system. In a much more confined system space, this dialogical action inquiry supports these arguments. The researcher has clearly played the role of a facilitator and has attempted to enable the research participants to develop collective understanding of problems and goals and to develop their own unique responses. As the examples provided in section 6.1.1.1 in Chapter Six show, some of the most significant results were not even achieved through the action plans the group prepared themselves but through the more ephemeral changes in relationships that occurred within the dialogical inquiry group.

The implication for the design and evaluation of dialogue and peacebuilding projects more generally, is that it may be more important to encourage careful and sustainable relationships between participants than to facilitate and document precise action plans. This is also a critique of the commonly used method of logical frameworks in peacebuilding and project management.[27] As I have argued elsewhere (2011, p. 73), peacebuilders and community development workers are well advised to not rely too heavily on precise logical frameworks and to hold their theories, concepts and assumptions lightly and be willing to change them if necessary (Hendrick 2009, p. 59). Too often international and domestic donors and funding organisations require precise

[27] The Logical Framework Approach is a set of interlocking concepts which must be used together in a dynamic fashion to develop a well-designed, objectively-described and evaluable project (Practical Concepts Incorporated 1979, p. 2).

objectives and performance indicators as part of the initial funding proposal, which hamper flexibility and encourage a post-project evaluation which seeks to confirm what was promised in the beginning, and do not consider local needs and circumstances enough.

Linear outcome oriented planning frameworks should not, however, be abandoned entirely. The *problematiques* and action plans developed by the dialogical inquiry group in this study also provide a planning framework of interrelated goals and connected action plans. As was presented in section 5.3.3 of Chapter Five, the inquiry process helped the participants to develop systemic and analytic thinking skills and better articulation of community problems and concerns. This was seen as a positive development by P1 and P3, both experienced community development workers. Logical frameworks force people to carefully think through the analysis of a conflict or social change situation and encourage them to clearly articulate how their planned interventions will respond to the problems identified (Ramalingam et al. 2008, p. 26).

What was different in this inquiry from many other peacebuilding and community development projects was that the analysis and planning was undertaken by the stakeholders themselves as part of their intercultural dialogue process. With the help of my facilitation the group developed their own understanding of the situation and formulated goals and responses within their personal influence networks. The process was open and flexible enough to include a variety of different voices and ideas and to assist them in documenting their collective understanding and decision-making. I did not pre-formulate goals and action plans but the group of stakeholders developed them during their conversations parallel to the development and change of their relationships. At an international peacebuilding and development level Ricigliano recognises the value of stakeholder driven analyses and ongoing relationship-centred work (2003, p. 452) . He suggests that international peacebuilding and development projects would benefit from the development of ‘networks of effective action’ which allow information exchange, relationship building and more nuanced analysis of a conflict or post-conflict situation instead of agencies and donors working next to each other and sometimes interfering with each other’s programs.

7.5 The effects of downward causation and social emergence on social change efforts

In the conceptual framework that I presented in Chapter Three, I located dialogue processes in a context described by the Attractor Landscape Model (ALM) based on the

work of Peter Coleman and his colleagues (2011; 2007). This model is useful to explain why certain conflict resolution or peacebuilding processes fail to attract participants or why the impact of well-implemented projects fails to encourage meaningful change. As Coleman and his colleagues have suggested, violent and destructive systems can be the status quo and can follow a strong and firmly established attractor pulling the system in a particular direction. Attempts to change historical narratives of violence, exclusion or rejection are difficult and have to compete with a large number of positive feedback loops that maintain the pull of the attractor. Coleman (2011) links positive and negative systems attractors to the experiences that people have when they encounter each other:

> [..] the more severe and abundant the negative experiences and encounters that accumulate in a particular relationship, the stronger the negative attractor; the more positive experiences accumulate, the more positive the attractor.

The research findings presented in section 5.4 in Chapter Five of this thesis support this theory. The participants in the dialogical inquiry frequently attempted to recruit more dialogue participants but met with rejection. The group clearly identified traumatic previous experiences as a barrier that prevents people from participating in dialogical experiences. They also identified peer pressure from in-groups as preventing others from engaging constructively across difference.

As was reported, people self-select not to engage in opportunities, even if they are offered. The result is that events and interventions are held with people who are already interested in cross-cultural engagement or peaceful encounters and, as bemoaned by many practitioners, they are ‘preaching to the converted’. If this phenomenon happens during interventions, blame is often laid at the host organisation for not having done enough to ensure a diversity of opinion and for not having reached the more reluctant groups in society. In light of my research I think this claim requires further discussion.

Downward causation can be so strong and positive conflict-enhancing feedback loops can be so prevalent that individuals are unable to participate in interventions that challenge their attractor-induced perspective. Dialogue projects in particular, aim to let participants experience diverse and different views to challenge monolithic identities and black-and-white views of the conflict. They therefore stem against the pull of the attractor. Situations exist in which the downward causation of the attractor is so strong that participation in the dialogical encounter is unthinkable. An example of where the downward causation was so strong that individuals even refrained from visiting a particular place was the experience of Brisbane’s Central Business District (CBD). The inquiry group discussed

that mothers of African background rarely venture into the CBD because they do not use prams and they feel unwelcome there (see section 5.4.1 in Chapter Five).

While downward causation can prevent participation or hinder the outward social emergence from dialogue effects, dialogue can, vice versa, counter this effect. Dialogical encounters can encourage individuals to discard the pull that historical narratives have on them and to decide to engage differently in the future. Chapter Five provided the example of D9 who expressed that her frustration with not finding a job, and her fear of meeting First Nations people on the street, was alleviated because of her positive experiences during the dialogical inquiry (see section 5.3.2). Other members of the inquiry group also voiced that the contact with people from different cultural backgrounds had given them confidence to act friendly and welcoming when meeting other from diverse backgrounds.

This creates the conundrum that historical narratives can prevent participation but participation is what can lessen the pull of historical narratives. Dialogical engagement is also an attractor (often a latent one in social systems with strong violent attractors), and it exerts downward causation on individuals. Individuals are likely to experience the pull of different attractors at the same time, even when participating in dialogical processes. This creates a unique moment or opportunity. Dialogue allows for a reflection on the downward causation affecting participants and gives them an opportunity to better understand previous and present behaviour. In this way dialogic moments can be understood as moments when participants experience the dichotomy of the pull of the attractor while at the same time experiencing genuine connection and relationship with something or someone opposed to the attractor. This opens up the possibility of change and of deliberately turning away from the attractor. I have attempted to visualise this opportunity which dialogue offers in figure 7.1 which is an evolution of the conceptual framework diagram presented in Chapter Three of the thesis:

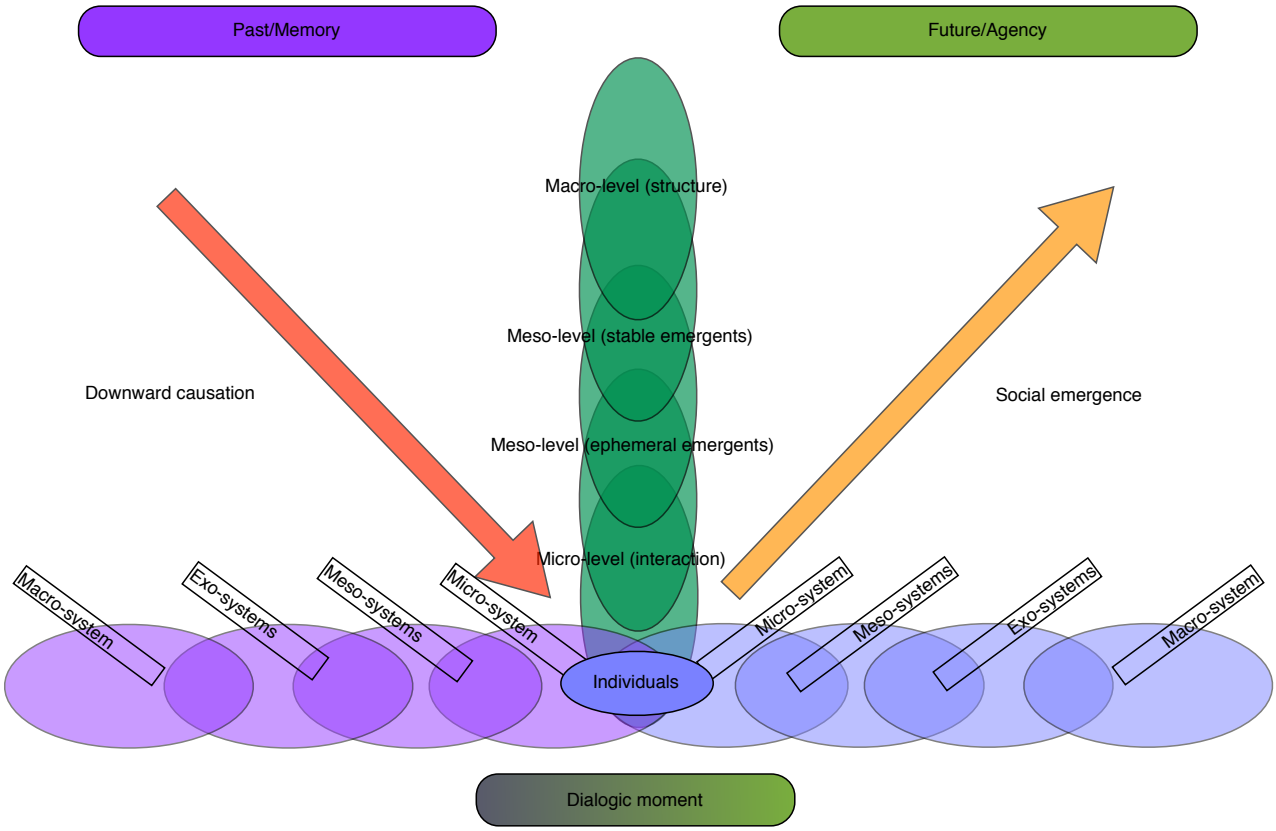

Figure 7.1 Dialogic moment concept

Participants who engage in dialogic encounters bring with them their individual memories of historical narratives and these shape their interaction in the dialogue. For some people invited to a dialogue process, the downward causation of the historical narratives will be too strong and they choose not to participate.

Downward causation occurs through previous personal experience but also through narratives repeated and emphasised by traditional and social media (macro-system), by peer networks such as family, friends (meso-systems) and by out-groups, government and other community organisations (exo-systems). Some of the downward constraint is social structure (laws, regulations, physical infrastructure, written stories, television news), some are stable emergents (repeated slogans, language or jokes) or ephemeral emergents (ideas, concerns, hypotheses). When participants engage in dialogue, their different historical narratives are put into context with each other. Sometimes these narratives clash, sometimes they confirm each other. Because the presentation of narratives in the form of ideas, statements and conclusions is different for each participant, and if the conditions for generative dialogue are met, then dialogic moments can occur.

In these moments the participants become aware of the sources of the downward causation they experience and they are able to reflect on them by comparing them to the narratives they hear from other participants. They also compare them to their experience in the moment of dialogic interaction. This creates a moment of lesser constraint in which participants can re-evaluate the validity and effect of the downward causation. At the same time, they develop new ephemeral and stable emergents which can over time (in sustained dialogue) emerge into social structure such as action plans, written reports, agreements and rituals of welcoming or hospitality. These emergents are products of a fusion of horizons between participants. Some of these ideas will be new and many of them will be collective ideas articulated in a shared language understood by the dialogue group (which is a stable emergent). The new emergents can create social structure without the necessity of them being recorded in writing. Stable emergents, such as changed and improved relationships and specific greetings and rituals of compassion and friendship, can be more powerful than ideas documented by the group in textual form.

The dialogue participants themselves act as conduits for the new emergents and social structure to permeate into their meso- and further on into their exo-systems. In this conceptual framework the individual and the group of individuals coming together for dialogue is central. Outcomes and social change projects connected to the dialogue are tied to the pathways of influence of the individuals (see section 6.1.3 in Chapter Six). This also means that it matters who participates in a dialogue process, as outcomes will be tied to the networks of participants. However, by engaging in dialogue, participants build relationships with each other and can tap into each other's peer networks and pathways of influence. Through individual actions based on collective ideas developed in dialogue, participants then impact on their peer networks and through those onto their communities and society at large. These impacts are mediated through a network of different individuals, groups and organisations and therefore change through the encounters along this path and the downward causation that people in the meso- and exo-systems are operating under.

Some changes will simply dissipate throughout the system without any recognisable systemic impact. Others may produce significant, but unexpected changes in parts of the system, and others again will produce delayed effects mediated through the network of people involved. If the networks of participants connect them to individuals, groups and organisations with significant influence on the development of historical narratives

(government, media, social media, large community organisations) this can lead to changes in policy and law or the viral spread of messages.

A recent example for the latter from Australia was the viral spread of the #illridewithyou hashtag after the hostage drama in Sydney on 15 December 2014.[28] Brisbane woman Rachael Jacobs accessed news about the siege on her smartphone while riding public transport in Brisbane. She observed how a fellow passenger, a woman who wore a Muslim headscarf, also accessed the news on her phone and then removed her headscarf while still on the train (Jacobs 2014). Per chance, both women disembarked at the same station. Concerned by what she interpreted as a fear of abuse by other passengers from the Muslim woman, Ms Jacobs then offered to walk with the woman to her destination to protect her. The encounter only lasted a few minutes, the woman seemed to appreciate the gesture but then both went their separate ways. Ms Jacobs posted two Facebook updates about this encounter on her Facebook page. These were picked up by a Facebook friend who then posted the updates publicly (Jacobs 2014).

Inspired by this Facebook story, Sydney TV content editor Tessa Kum created the #illridewithyou hashtag and announced on Twitter which bus she regularly took to and from work. Via Twitter she invited people wearing religious attire who did not feel safe to get in contact with her so that she could ride with them (Ruppert 2014). This tweet started a Twitter and Facebook campaign in which non-Muslim Australians pledged to ride with Muslim Australians to protect them from abuse so they would not have to hide their religion and cultural attire. It amassed more almost 120,000 tweets by the evening (Ruppert 2014) and was picked up by many prominent Australians, including the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner. A specific individual encounter sparked a new and innovative idea, which was communicated through the social network of the original Twitter poster. If the posts had not been followed by a significant network of people, who spread them further, it is unlikely that such a strong viral message would have occurred. Later this created social structure in the form of newspaper articles and public speeches.

Returning to social emergence from dialogue, it has become clear that the social emergence of ideas and structure in dialogue takes time and may require multiple dialogic moments. I was fortunate to be able to facilitate a sustained dialogical inquiry process as part of this PhD research. Many dialogue projects are limited to single or few encounters

[28] On 15–16 December 2014, a lone gunman, Man Haron Monis, held hostage ten customers and eight employees of a Lindt chocolate café located at Martin Place in Sydney, Australia. Police treated the event as a terrorist attack. The attacker forced hostages to hold up an Islamic black flag against the window of the café (Ralston 2014).

with changing participants. While this can produce significant effects, like the encounter at the start of the #illridewithyou campaign, this cannot be predicted or planned in a complex social system. A more reliable approach is to design sustained dialogue projects that engage participants over a significant amount of time, which are not strongly outcome-focused but allow the participants to set their own goals, and to create multiple opportunities for sharing personal experiences as precursors to dialogic moments. This thesis has provided a facilitation and research methodology for such a project and has identified conditions necessary for dialogic moments to occur.

7.6 Contributions of the dialogical inquiry towards constructive multiculturalism and engagement with First Nations Australia

In section 2.1 of Chapter 2 it was theorised that what is necessary to support better engagement between white settler Australians, First Nations Australians and new and emerging communities is more dialogical engagement and a becoming of other by people from different cultural backgrounds. The personal experiences of the dialogue participants showed that they thought they were able to revise stereotypes and that they became more confident and vocal to address issues of racism and discrimination (see sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.4 in Chapter Five). The inquiry participants actively practiced a welcoming, friendly and open attitude and expressed these outside the dialogue group at community events and in their own peer networks.

The dialogical inquiry included Aboriginal Australians, white settler Australians and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. It was shown that dialogical engagement across these different groups is not just possible but, according to their views, is indeed valuable. The data created by the inquiry group during the CDD process shows a rich tapestry of experiences and provided opportunity for participants to compare and contextualise their own experiences. Similarities between Aboriginal and refugee experiences were established in Chapter Five (see for example section 5.4.2) and allowed the group to develop a collective language with which to describe barriers between communities and goals to overcome them. Aboriginal Australians and participants from refugee backgrounds both pointed out the significance of constraining historical narratives which shaped people's experiences of cross-cultural encounters. They also recognised that a dialogical encounter like the one facilitated as part of the research for this thesis, was a highly engaging, useful, safe and transforming experience. Relationships built during the inquiry process still remain, more than three years after the end of the dialogue meetings and participants have enacted a number of important projects to further their

identified goals. I argue that a welcoming and respectful facilitation of contact between people from different cultural backgrounds is a necessary building block for increasing social inclusion and for building 'well-connected communities' (Gilchrist 2004). While not everyone will be able to participate in public dialogue processes with the aim to build better relationships, people who do benefit not only personally but often produce non-linear systemic effects which can be beneficial for their own and other communities. In my experience of working in the multicultural sector in Australia, much work in this space is about education and leadership development and too often workshops and engagement events are held with homogenous cultural groups. This thesis argues that cross-cultural engagement and creation of opportunities to meet are more important than these activities.

Creating these safe and welcoming spaces for engagement requires attention and often facilitation. The participants in this inquiry remarked in section 5.5 in Chapter Five that the facilitator plays an important role in coordinating meetings and in holding the safe space. They discovered that there are two fears that prevent people from making contact: the fear of the other as an unknown and the fear of embarrassing themselves because of the lack of knowledge about cultural protocols. A facilitator can alleviate these fears by providing a space in which all participants are guests. Facilitation processes, like the CDD process or the World Café Conversations method, which I have used extensively for cross-cultural Community Cafés, provide another cultural space with rules that are partly familiar and partly unfamiliar for everyone. This has a levelling effect and alleviates fears of embarrassing oneself in front of others.

While the participants in the inquiry noted the problem of gatekeepers and the goal to become more independent from government and private sector convenors, this was tied to an advocacy role (section 5.2.2 in Chapter Five). With regards to a facilitation role and the role of a dialogue host it may be more useful to have a host facilitator from a third cultural group or associated with a service provider or non-government organisation so that they can create a process that is not firmly rooted in one particular cultural tradition. The meaning of the word dialogue was tied to its Greek roots and often dialogue processes are built on Western theories of participative democracy. While this presumes some inherent cultural biases most cultural groups know processes of engagement, storytelling, listening and knowledge sharing.

In Australia many Aboriginal kinship groups use 'yarning circles', which bear many similarities to circle processes (Kraybill & Wright 2006, p. 14). Even though the CDD process was unfamiliar to all participants, it was embraced by them and they made it their

own by developing and adding greeting rituals, by bringing food and by engaging in personal story-sharing, often encouraged by the problem-focused discussion of ideas generated during the inquiry process. I deliberately moved the CDD process along slowly, and continuously checked in with participants whether they were comfortable with the process and the dialogical conversation. During the first session of the CDD inquiry I explained the process and discussed any questions from the participants. I encouraged them to define their own problem- and vision-questions. As discussed in the methodology presented in Chapter Four, participants predominantly typed the ideas and clarifications into the software themselves, which provided them with another opportunity to take control of the process. This process took a significant amount of time and the core group of participants asked for an extension of the inquiry sessions. Without this extension it would have been unlikely that participants like D12 (who attended nearly every session after joining the group) would have joined the inquiry process. This suggests that an unhurried approach to dialogue that provides ample opportunity for participants to build relationships with each other is effective.

The action research process presented in this thesis met its limits with regards to impacting on the larger macro-system of Australian society. In section 2.1 of Chapter Two the lack of acknowledgment of colonial history and the white paranoid nationalism that runs throughout Australian society were discussed. This research has done little to change these and was never intended to. They are strong attractors pulling Australian society in particular directions and can be used to explain the harsh treatment of asylum seekers and refugees as well as the fraught reconciliation and decolonisation process that was lamented by First Nations and white settler authors in Chapter Two. These attractors are built on historical narratives of guilt and fear of the other and it would be foolish to expect that one small-group dialogue process as the one underlying this thesis would be able to make significant changes here. On a minute scale important transformations occurred and the participants involved in the inquiry have and will impact further on connecting their communities and on providing others with a heartfelt and warm welcome. It is my sincere hope that they will be able to change interpersonal experiences of many others and therefore over time change the narratives of exclusion and fear still prevalent in many groups and places. I think that replicating inquiries like the one presented in this thesis with many different groups over time could have beneficial impacts. As P1 pointed out in section 6.5.3 in Chapter Six, it is necessary to join the dialogical journey to fully experience its beneficial impacts and effects.

7.7 Conclusion

In summary, the research undertaken for this thesis has provided for a series of insights and reflections relevant to peacebuilding, community development and social change. Given that dialogical engagement is seen as a key approach in these fields (Coleman 2011; Dodson & Cronin 2011; Pruitt & Thomas 2007; Ropers 2004; Schoem & Hurtado 2001; Westoby & Dowling 2013) this research is relevant.

The chapter has made a case for the value of dialogical action research in general, and for the use of CDD in particular, for researching process and outcomes of dialogue projects. Moreover, it has provided a definition of dialogue that stresses the importance of moments of mutuality and considers these as the defining element of dialogue which differentiates it from other types of discussion or from other types of conflict resolution processes.

A key to understanding what happens in dialogical encounters is the theory of downward causation and social emergence. Based on the findings of this study this theory has been further refined. It was postulated that dialogic moments are encounters when different historical narratives converge. This provides a unique experience for participants as it can lessen the pull of system attractors and provide participants with an opportunity to make a conscious choice to see the situation in a more multidimensional way and to choose a different systems attractor.

The chapter also highlighted the importance of relational changes and the emergence of pro-social norms and has argued that these are more important than specific, measurable goals and action plans as outcomes of dialogic encounters. It has further discussed that it matters who attends dialogue processes and that the implementation of dialogue outcomes is strongly connected to the social networks of participants. This is an area that requires further research.

Finally, the chapter has discussed the contributions of the research to stalled reconciliation process between First Nations Australians and settler peoples and to the debate about multiculturalism and immigration in Australia. This highlighted the limits of the research with regards to producing generative social change. It became clear that a time-limited PhD study could not hope to address firmly established system attractors in Australian society. However, the study has made a difference on a small scale. It has also made an argument for sustained and unhurried processes of dialogical engagement and has provided examples of how these have benefited participants and their communities.

The overall conclusions from the study, as well as ideas for further research and practice will be presented in the final conclusion chapter of the study.

8. Conclusion: summary of the research and future directions

This PhD thesis was undertaken as a part-time research project. I started in 2008 and submitted the thesis for examination in 2015. Whilst working on the thesis I have worked as a mediator, lecturer, trainer and facilitator, often in close contact or partnership with settlement service providers, state and local government and various other organisations. One of the observations that I have made in Brisbane is that intergroup dialogue projects, which aim first and foremost to build relationships and to allow people to have meaningful conversations with each other, are rare. Most often host organisations, funders and practitioners pursue multiple goals and specific social change outcomes.

I have also experienced a large number of projects, action ideas and successful (and also unsuccessful) initiatives that were sparked by members of this dialogical inquiry group. A colleague of mine calls this the 'ripple effect' of our work. Like the ripples created by a stone thrown into a pond, changed relationships reverberate through communities and touch people's lives in unexpected ways. In this chapter I want to briefly summarise the journey that this thesis has taken and then provide an outlook for the future. This includes my own reflections and ideas for further research and ways to improve dialogical practice and community connections. I will also offer a model for evaluating the impact of systemic action research and invite the reader to apply it to this thesis. The thesis ends with a brief window into current dialogue projects that I am involved in and which continue the goal defined by the dialogical inquiry group to 'provide people with a lived experience of respect'.

8.1 Summary of the research process

The research underlying this thesis was developed out of a desire to improve relationships between First Nations Australians, white settlers and recent arrivals from refugee backgrounds, and to better understand the effects of dialogical encounters on participants and their communities.

Based on media excerpts collected during the study and on a review of scholarly literature about multiculturalism and racism in Australia the theory was formed that Australia suffers from a system attractor which encourages a paranoid nationalism, fear of otherness and which creates barriers between people from different cultural backgrounds (Hage 2003, p. 52). This attractor is deeply rooted in the colonial history of the country and has manifested in policy, laws, public discourse and even infrastructure.

The research engaged a culturally diverse group of people from the greater Brisbane area and provided them with the opportunity to collectively discuss and analyse their experiences of multiculturalism and connections between communities. Through the use of structured facilitation and the Creative Dialogue & Design method the group developed an analysis of their own experiences which they shared with other communities, state and local government, and settlement service providers. At the same time the participants experienced personal transformations, such as an increase in confidence while approaching cross-cultural encounters, and also positive changes in their relationships with other group members. These changes were noticed by people in their peer networks. The inquiry led to a number of action plans and small-scale but beneficial changes implemented by the inquiry group.

The research process also provided insights into the conditions and workings of dialogue processes, which emphasised the importance of relationship-changes and dialogic moments. Even though data from these moments was difficult to record their importance was recognised and incorporated into a definition of dialogue that aims to address shortcomings in the available literature and clarify misconceptions.

The application of a conceptual framework based on the Attractor Landscape Model (Coleman 2011) and social emergence theory (Sawyer 2005) allowed for an analysis of the experiences of participants which further explained the impact of historical narratives for the development of social structure. This led to a conceptualisation of dialogic moments as encounters in which historical narratives converge, and the hypothesis that this convergence is what lessens the pull of downward causation in the form of system attractors. This is an explanation of why dialogue processes can be useful to encourage social emergence of new and creative ideas. At the same time, the theory was useful to explain why participants may self-select not to attend a dialogical encounter when it runs counter to a strong system attractor.

The data presented emphasised that in this dialogical action research inquiry the development of stable emergents in the form of pro-social group norms, created more impact outside the dialogue micro-system than the actual action plans which the group developed. This points to a recommendation for peacebuilding and conflict resolution practitioners to focus more on creating a safe container for relationships to be improved than on reaching measurable outcomes or action plans. It was also found that even if well-defined goals and action plans can be achieved, their implementation is strongly tied to the social networks of dialogue participants.

Finally, the research provided for opportunities to reflect on the role and relationship of the facilitator within the inquiry. Based on the argument that under a systems ontology any observation is also a systemic intervention, it was found that facilitators play important roles in building safe containers for learning and engagement. They also help participants to develop a collective language and can slow down conversations to provide more opportunities for equal participation and story exchange. These story exchanges often precede dialogical moments. At the same time facilitators are also participants in the processes and their views and ideas become part of the collective conversation. This is inevitable and should be embraced rather than rejected.

The research helped to refine the theory of social emergence and dialogical engagement. It also demonstrated challenges to the method and raised further questions and puzzles. These will be outlined in the following section.

8.2 Future directions

The following reflections summarise much of the learning that I have drawn from conducting this research and they are offered as insights, personal viewpoints and puzzles for further research and practice:

1. Dialogue itself can be a powerful research process and can create and document important social phenomena and changes. A dialogical approach to action research opens doors and creates opportunities that other research methods may not. In a dialogue all participants (including the facilitators) give and receive something. They share stories and experiences that sometimes change them. This creates social bonds, relationships and even friendships. Such relationships enrich the lives of more isolated or vulnerable people while at the same time providing unique insights for researchers or policy-makers. At the same time a dialogical approach requires giving up some control and also predictability.

2. Outcomes of dialogical inquiries are uncertain and non-linear effects need to be embraced. This does not fit well into logical frameworks and other planning or reporting tools, including most funding applications. It would be commendable if governments and donors engaged in social change, peacebuilding or development projects recognised this and embraced more process-driven methodologies. Key performance indicators tied to predetermined objectives rarely measure real-world changes and complicate dialogical methodologies. A more honest approach to applying for funding and to evaluating projects would be to acknowledge the significant uncertainties that

always accompany social change initiatives in complex social systems. Project proposals should be more focused on clearly describing the methodology of engagement and should articulate how they intend to encourage dialogic moments among participants. There should be room for recognition and documentation of non-linear effects.

3. Dialogue takes time and dialogic moments can not be engineered, they can only be encouraged. Dialogue projects that attempt to produce meaningful engagement in one short encounter will rarely work. Sustained engagement over a significant period of time allows participants to build relationships and to develop a systemic understanding of the problems they are facing. Storytelling is an important element of dialogue and participants should be encouraged to tell personal stories and to speak from their own experience. The importance of stories also requires further research and understanding. While this study has indicated that storytelling can precipitate dialogic moments, this link needs further enquiry.

4. Structured and carefully facilitated dialogue processes help people to participate as equals but they need to be flexible enough to allow opportunities for dialogic moments. While the structure is useful to establish the container and to create systemic analysis, it is not what creates dialogic moments. These are created through more free-form exchanges between participants and stories that resonate and turn into ephemeral and stable emergents. Facilitators need to walk a fine line between structure and encouraging self-organisation. They should also be prepared to step away from the idea of total facilitator neutrality. It is impossible and undesirable to completely stay out of content discussions. Process will always impact on content and participants may actually benefit from hearing the facilitator's views. These should be clearly marked, as such, so that the influence can be traced. Facilitators should also be humble and only present their own views when asked.

5. Even well-designed and well-resourced dialogue projects may fail in creating significant cross-cultural inter-group exchanges if downward causation is too strong and produces an anti-dialogical systemic attractor. Sometimes the time is not ripe for dialogue projects or the right participants cannot be recruited. Dialogues can then be held with less constrained participants to discuss how other groups who refuse to participate can be engaged. Dialogical effects may still reach these groups through peer networks and may spark interest in future dialogue projects.

6. Dialogue requires a certain comfort with ontological insecurity. Participants need to at least be open to having their views challenged or be willing to listen to the views of others. If this is not the case and civil conversation cannot be arranged then dialogue processes are unlikely to work. Dialogue is at heart a process of face-to-face exchange and interaction and it is unlikely that people who have not been part of this interaction will be able to understand the collective conversation that happens in dialogue, even if it is documented well and distributed outside the dialogue. This is a barrier to upscaling dialogue projects.

7. The current situation in Australia is notably lacking in dialogue projects. In federal politics simplistic outcomes ('stopping the refugee boats' and 'improving Indigenous life expectancy') seem to be the only goals for policy and projects. Dialogue is the opposite of three or four word slogans. It embraces uncertainty, engages in problem-finding instead of problem-solving and encourages different perspectives and openness to creative suggestions. Projects aimed at improving the reconciliation process and at sparking a better national debate about how Australia meets its obligations towards vulnerable people seeking refuge, need to utilise this more cumbersome but ultimately more rewarding approach. Complex problems cannot be explained in simple language. They need to be discussed, reflected upon and discussed again in sustained conversations with different and diverse groups. Policy-makers would do well to make more use of such processes to inform themselves.

8.2 Evaluation of impact

It seems almost surreal to be writing the final conclusions and to summarise the plethora of views, ideas and insights that were generated by the participants in this action research inquiry.

The journey has been fulfilling for me as a researcher and I hope that I was able to capture it appropriately for the reader. Systemic thinkers sometimes recommend a zooming in and zooming out to keep both the micro- and the macro-view in perspective (Bar-Yam 2004, pp. 26-7). I believe that the research findings presented in this thesis do this, even if it creates a sometimes jumbled collage of different pieces. I started this research with a sense that dialogical engagement would be helpful for understanding complexity and complex systems but I found that while many other researchers and practitioners working with complex systems science advocated the use of dialogue the link seemed somewhat tenuous.

The key for me is the idea of collective communication as advocated by David Bohm. Many inquiry sessions that I facilitated had me become part of such collective conversations and afterwards I reflected on the richness and diversity of ideas which sometimes did and sometimes did not fit together. Many sessions seemed to veer off into tangents and more than once I was worried that we would not reach our goal of developing the two *problematiques* and action plans. I now realise that these worries were caused by an overly strong concern with creating documentable and specific outcomes. The dialogue flowed like a river and carved its own path through the terrain of overlapping networks and communities. The path a river takes is also a complex interplay of water movement and environment, with many factors influencing each other over time. I have learned to trust this river of dialogue.

It is time to ask myself if this research has created quality outcomes or knowledge. Danny Burns (2007, p. 160) has articulated the following criteria for quality action research in one of his projects:

- Has it generated innovative action?
- Has it led to greater understanding?
- Has it generated insight into disabling patterns within the system?
- Has it developed strong distributed leadership?
- Has it led to the integration of evaluation, policy and practice development?
- Has it built effective cross-boundary working and relationships?

I believe the previous chapter and the reflections presented above have shown that the answer to most of these questions (at least from my perspective as facilitator and researcher) is yes. Ultimately it is up to the reader of this thesis to decide whether these aims were achieved or not and I would value feedback, comments and most importantly critique pointing out blind spots and shortcomings so that I may improve the method in the future. It is my hope that this thesis provides insight into what I consider an innovative dialogical inquiry method that firmly links research and practice intervention and builds meaningful relationships among participants and researchers.

8.3 Afterword: the dialogical journey continues

Imagine entering a room buzzing with energy, full of people from different cultural and national backgrounds engaged in meaningful conversations. Groups of four people are gathered around small tables with coloured tablecloths and little vases full of fresh flowers. Like a popular café, all fifteen or so tables are full and there is upbeat music playing in the

background. Throughout the room people are building connections. In one corner, three people are drinking coffee and chatting by a table laden with food. You can hear people laughing at one table, others write on butcher's paper which is spread out like a tablecloth, whilst listening to an Aboriginal Elder talking about her relationship with country. At a third table three people, one an elderly lady from a white settler Australian background, one an Aboriginal man in his sixties, and the third, a lady of Pacific Islander background, are focused on a young man from Burma who is telling the story of how he came to Australia as a refugee after spending more than a decade in a refugee camp in Asia. In the corner of the room a group of children of South Sudanese, Cook Islander and Burundian backgrounds are drawing pictures together while their parents are sharing conversations. After about thirty minutes, a facilitator gets up from one of the tables and addresses the room through a microphone: 'It looks like you all have a lot of stories to tell to each other. That's great. But what I would like you to do is save some of these stories for the next round. Everyone except for one person at each table has to get up now and change tables. Grab a cup of coffee and a tasty bite, and then move to a new table. Community Café is all about meeting as many people as possible while you are here, so please get up and move now. I am sure you will find a new friendly group who is excited to hear your story.' After some brief hesitation, the people at the tables thank each other, get up and find a new group to talk with (Loode 2013).

What you have just glimpsed is a Community Café Dialogue. Community Cafés are safe and intentional spaces where everyone is welcome. The aim of the Cafés is simply to create a space where people can meet, connect and reconnect, and take part in conversations that matter over a shared meal. The participants in this dialogical research inquiry were recruited at such an event, and they have contributed to more than 30 Community Cafés after the end of the inquiry process. They have raised funds, acted as an advisory group, invited communities and participants and shared their experiences from the CDD process and other dialogues with up to 160 people at large Café dialogue events. Community Cafés are now firmly established in Brisbane and are being run every month. Without the knowledge generated during this PhD research and the connections built during the dialogical inquiry I seriously doubt that I would have been able to create a sustainable and ongoing program of public intercultural dialogue processes. I am deeply indebted to all participants of this research inquiry and look forward to continuing our dialogical journey into the future to build more well-connected communities.

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Appendix 1: Overview of dialogue participants

	Background	*Reason for attending the dialogue*	*Sessions attended*
D1	South Sudanese male in his forties. Social worker and involved in South Sudanese community association.	Gain personal understanding of community problems, build personal skills to facilitate dialogue and give back to Sudanese community.	1
D2	Third generation Scottish-Welsh Australian female in her seventies. Married to D3 and well connected in D3's Aboriginal community networks. Background in public service.	Annoyed at the media for being divisive about people coming to Australia, wants to find out more about migrants and refugees and hear their stories. Wants to raise awareness for life stories of new and emerging community members.	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 14, 19
D3	Sixty-two year old Aboriginal male with ancestors from North Stradbroke Island and the mission in Cherbourg. Married to D2. Works in public service.	Personal journey to meet people from other communities.	1, 4, 19
D4	Twenty-four year old Rohingya male refugee who left his home country of Burma for fear of persecution and lived for eighteen years in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. Came to Brisbane in 2009 to begin a new life. Active in local Rohingya community. Muslim.	Learn how to build better relationships to live peacefully together.	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18

	Background	*Reason for attending the dialogue*	*Sessions attended*
D5	Kenyan male in his thirties. Doctoral student and community development worker. Organised Community Cafés for Brisbane City Council and is well connected in African, Aboriginal and other communities in Brisbane.	Learn which elements of dialogue contribute to positive relationships and how culture impacts on inter communal relationships.	1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19
D6	South Sudanese female in her twenties. Works in the public service. Active in South Sudanese community and well connected with other communities.	Enjoyed the Community Café Dialogues and wants to learn more about facilitating dialogue. Wants to find out if differences between young and old people are driven by culture.	1, 4, 11, 15, 17, 19
D7	Aboriginal female elder in her sixties. Did not know her cultural background until she was in her forties. First marriage with a white British man. Very active in Aboriginal community organisations. Suffered from breast cancer and is a member of the Breast Cancer Network Australia.	Increase cultural awareness and teach children about culture. Accept people living in diversity and support cross-cultural collaboration. Aboriginal people have often been consulted but no feedback was given back to them by the government. This needs to change.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
D8	Female Aboriginal elder in her sixties. Ancestors from Vanuatu, married to Aboriginal elder and recognised as elder in the Aboriginal community. Ancestors were blackbirded to Queensland. Christian.	Input into community dialogue and having her voice heard. Education of children in cultural heritage.	2

	Background	*Reason for attending the dialogue*	*Sessions attended*
D9	Mozambican female in her forties. Came to Australia in 2008 with her then husband. Speaks more than eight languages, education in business and management. Has a daughter who studies in Brisbane. Had a number of frustrating and discriminating experiences when trying to find work. Enrolled in a postgraduate degree in management. Active in African community organisations. Muslim.	Wants to give back to community and meet new people. Hopes to make connections to find better work opportunities. Wants to learn more about Aboriginal people.	4, 9
D10	Fifty-four year old Rohingya male who immigrated to Australia as a refugee in 2010. Experienced torture and abuse in Burma. Hardly speaks any English. D4 translated for him. Muslim.	Invited by D4. Connect with other communities and share experiences of life in Burma and in a refugee camp so that others hear about the human rights violations on the Rohingya people.	6, 7, 8

	Background	*Reason for attending the dialogue*	*Sessions attended*
D11	Thirty-two year old Ethiopian male. Grew up in remote village in Southern part of Ethiopia and became a member of the opposition party. Spent sixteen months in jail in Ethiopia as political prisoner of conscience before fleeing to Kenya and then to Uganda. Works for a settlement service provider and is an active community and church member. Postgraduate education. Christian.	Dialogue is an essential part of interpersonal communication and he wants to connect with others and share experiences.	8, 9, 12, 13, 16,
D12	Fifty year old Hazara Afghani male. Suffered persecution in Afghanistan. After his father's death in Afghanistan he fled the country in 2001 and paid a people smuggler in Indonesia to take him to Australia. The boat was intercepted and he spent two months in detention on Christmas Island and then three years on Nauru. Since his immigration in 2004 he has lived in Brisbane. Active in Hazara community and other community organisations. Muslim.	Invited by D4. Build better connections to other communities and learn more about living together. Wants to bring community leaders together to build better relationships.	11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

	Background	*Reason for attending the dialogue*	*Sessions attended*
D13	White Zimbabwean female in her twenties. Grew up in Zimbabwe before studying in Australia. Family lost farm to anti-white regime in Zimbabwe. Community development worker.	Invited by D11. Wants to learn more about community engagement and conflict resolution. Passionate about participatory processes which build grassroots capacity.	13

Appendix 2: Sample CDD session outline

Session 8 on 11 June 2012

Context: This session was the last one of the problem-mapping phase.

Outline:

8.45am D2 arrives.

9.00am D11 arrives. Participant information and informed consent.

9.30am D4 arrives (still waiting for D10).

9.36am D10 arrives.

10.10. D7 arrives (flat tyre).

10.15am Start of CDD Voting (D4 and D10 vote together because of language).

10.30am Discussion of ranking.

10.35am D10 and D4 leave (D4 has appointment at settlement service provider).

10.40am Discussion of structuring question

10.40am Structuring starts.

11.20am Morning tea.

11.35am Structuring resumes.

12.45pm Structuring complete. Serge creates wall map.

1.00pm Map complete. Brief reflection.

1.05pm Evaluation and close.

Appendix 3: CDD session schedule

Date	*Session No.*	*Attendance*
9 April 2011	Session 1	D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7
16 April 2011	Session 2	D4, D7, D8
30 April 2011	Session 3	D2, D4, D7
7 May 2011	Session 4	D2, D3, D5, D6, D7, D9
21 May 2011	Session 5	D4, D7
28 May 2011	Session 6	D4, D7, D10
4 June 2011	Session 7	D2, D4, D5, D7, D10
11 June 2011	Session 8	D2, D4, D7, D10, D11
16 July 2011	Session 9	D2, D7, D9, D11
23 July 2011	Session 10	D4, D5, D7
30 July 2011	Session 11	D4, D5, D6, D7, D12
13 August 2011	Session 12	D4, D7, D11, D12
20 August 2011	Session 13	D11, D13
10 September 2011	Session 14	D2, D4, D7, D12
8 October 2011	Session 15	D4, D5, D6, D7, D12
15 October 2011	Session 16	D4, D5, D7, D11, D12
22 October 2011	Session 17	D6, D7, D12
29 October 2011	Session 18	D4, D7, D12
26 November 2011	Session 19	D2, D3, D7, D12
21 January 2012	Session 20	D2, D7, D12
25 February 2012	Session 21	D2, D6, D9, D12
4 June 2012	Session 22	D2, D4, D7, D12
2 February 2013	Session 23	D2, D4, D5, D6, D7, D9, D12

Appendix 4: Dialogue focus group discussion guide

Focus Group 1 (21 May 2011, during problem-mapping stage)

1. Our dialogue is taking us longer than expected. Why do you want to go on with the process and extend the sessions?
2. With whom did you talk about the CDD process? What did you say?
3. What did the people you talked to say?
4. How do you intend to bring more people to this dialogue process?
5. Did you experience any changes since the start of the CDD dialogue? In yourself or in the community?

Focus Group 2 (16 July 2011, after problem-mapping stage)

1. Did you find the dialogue process helpful? (Warm up question)
2. What does the problem map on the wall tell you?
3. What effect did it have to hear the other participants' ideas and clarifications?
4. With whom did you talk about the CDD process? What did you say?
5. What did the people you talked to say?
6. Did you experience any changes since the start of the CDD dialogue? In yourself or in the community?
7. What should we improve in the next stage?

Focus Group 3 (22 October 2011, after vision-mapping stage)

1. Did you find the dialogue process helpful? (Warm up question)
2. What does the vision map on the wall tell you?
3. What effect did it have to hear the other participants' ideas and clarifications?
4. With whom did you talk about the CDD process? What did you say?
5. What did the people you talked to say?
6. Did you experience any changes since the start of the CDD dialogue? In yourself or in the community?

Focus Group 4 (26 November 2011, after action-planning stage)

1. What sparked the ideas for the projects and action plans that were developed in the last session?
2. How did working with other group members help or hinder the generation of the action plans?
3. Do you think that the discussions with your friends, family etc. between the dialogue sessions influenced the action plans that were generated?
4. With whom did you talk about the CDD process and what did these people say?
5. Are you going to contact other members of the group after the dialogue to implement the action plans?
6. What are the next steps for the group to work on the problem?
7. Are you going to use the CDD process yourself in the future?

Focus Group 5 (2 February 2013, data analysis focus group)

1. When you look at the data presented to you today, do you have any reflections?
2. What has happened since the dialogue? Is there any progress on the action plans?
3. Did you involve other people outside the dialogue group? If yes, what did these people contribute?
4. When you look back and remember our dialogue, what have you learned?
5. What impact has the dialogue had on you personally?
6. How do ideas move from the small dialogue group to the larger community?
7. Were there any negative effects? Did something unexpected happen?

Appendix 5: Overview of peer network participants

	Background	*Referred by*	*Date of interview*
P1	Community development worker from Brisbane City Council involved in multicultural policy and projects. White Anglo-Australian.	D4, D5	3 March 2012
P2	Community development manager for Sisters of Mercy and Romero Centre. Muslim woman in her forties. Well connected in refugee communities.	D4, D12	25 May 2012
P3	Previously community development co-ordinator at major settlement service provider. Liberian and very active in national Liberian organisation. Well connected through African and other refugee and migrant communities. Now working with Brisbane City Council.	D4, D12	31 May 2012
P4	Twenty-two year old Filipino. Law student at local university. Came to Australia five years ago. Personal friend of D6.	D6	3 October 2012
P5	School administrator in school south of Brisbane in her late forties. Daughter of D2. Familiar with multicultural school environment.	D2	5 October 2012
P6	Youth worker and manager of a Brisbane youth agency. White Anglo-Australian. Colleague of D7.	D7	23 November 2012

Appendix 6: Peer network interview guide

1. Do think there are barriers between communities here in Brisbane?

2. How did you hear about the dialogue and what motivated you to participate in this research?

3. What has your friend/relative/colleague told you about the dialogue?

4. Did you voice any opinions or views in talking with your friend/relative/colleague which could have found their way into the dialogue? Do you feel you had any input without being in the room?

5. Did you hear about the action plans that the group developed? If yes, what do you think of them?

6. Do you think the dialogue has helped the community in Brisbane? If yes, how has it helped?

7. Do you have any other views or reflections about the dialogue or this research?